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SLA militiaman wounded

MARJAYOUN (AFP) — A member of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia was wounded on Monday in a bomb blast in southern Lebanon, the SLA said. The militiaman was injured in an explosion near his position in Kroum Al Arz, in the Christian-dominated Jezzine region which adjoins Israel's self-declared "security zone" in southern Lebanon, the SLA said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. Three SLA militiamen have been killed and 11 injured in attacks in southern Lebanon this year. Most of the attacks were carried out by Hizbollah, which is spearheading a campaign to drive Israeli troops out of Lebanon.

UAE sends medicine to Iraq

ABU DHABI (AP) — The Red Crescent Society of the Emirates has sent $548,000 worth of medicine to Iraq, the group said Monday. The goods, going by truck via Jordan, were expected to reach Iraq this week. The Red Crescent Society, the Islamic equivalent of the Red Cross, has sent more than $5.48 million worth of aid to Iraq since 1996, the group said. An official said the Emirates society plans to open an office in the Iraqi capital Baghdad by the end of the year to coordinate the distribution of humanitarian aid. He asked that his name not be used. In February, the Emirates sent two planes to Iraq carrying 80 tonnes of food, medicine and clothing. U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait bar Iraq from exporting oil, except in limited quantities under U.N. supervision, and ban other trade dealings.

After Netanyahu's acceptance:

Arafat welcomes Blair's call for high-level talks in London

GAZA CITY (AP) — In a first success in Mideast peacemakiog, Britisb Prime Minister Tony Blair on Monday persuaded Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to attend high-level peace talks in London next month.

Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu bas already accepted Mr. Blair's offer, making it likely the London meetings will take place early next month.

The format still needs to be worked out — a job that apparently will be tackled by U.S envoy Dennis Ross wben he returns to the region later this week.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat hold talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in the Palestinian presidential office in Gaza on Monday (Reuters photo)

In recent months, Mr. Arafat steadfastly refused to meet with Mr. Netanyahu, saying he did not want to create a false impression of progress at a time when Israel is not ready to make concessions on a West Bank troop withdrawal.

Earlier Monday, Mr. Arafat's advisers insisted that ahead of London talks, the United States must go public with its still unofficial proposal that Israel withdraw from 13.1 per cent of the West Bank in several stages over 12 weeks. Israel would bave to accept the American offer, the advisers said. However, the Palestinians softened their position after a Blair-Arafat meeting in Gaza City.

Asked about the Palestinian conditions, Palestinian Cabinet minister Hanan Ashrawi said: "Israel sbould deal positively with the American ideas."

"Israel has signalled some flexibility, with an Israeli official saying Monday that Mr. Netanyahu was considering a pullback from 11 per cent of the West Bank, up from his earlier limit of 9 per cent.

In talks with Mr. Netanyahu on Sunday, Mr. Blair proposed to host meetings in London between Mr. Arafat, the Israeli leader and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The format was not yet clear, Israeli and Palestinian officials said Ms. Albright could meet separately with Mr. Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu, hold a three-way summit, or even bring Mr. Blair into the talks.

Asked about Mr. Arafat's response, Ms. Ashrawi told the Associated Press: "He welcomed the idea, but we

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King, Blair warn of serious consequences if peace process stalemate continues

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — British Prime Minister Tony Blair started discussions with Palestinian officials on Monday one day after be and His Majesty King Hussein warned that the stalemate in the peace process poses a serious threat to the security of the region and the whole world.

King Hussein said on Sunday after talks with Mr. Blair that the peace process can still be saved, but Palestinians and Israelis must go back to the negotiating table or else an era of darkness will engulf the region.

The two leaders also stressed full support to the U.S. initiative to resume the peace talks, and voiced their commitment to exert all necessary efforts to complement Washington's moves.

His Majesty King Hussein and British Prime Minister Tony Blair talking to reporters at a joint press conference at the Royal Palace in Amman on Sunday (Photo by Yousef Allan)

At a joint press conference with Mr. Blair, King Hussein said: "This is a time when I believe the peace process can be saved, or otherwise we will all be plunged into a very dark and very dangerous period."

"We must do wbatever we can for... the descendants of the children of Abraham to live in peace and security, in human dignity, and to put their abilities together to build a future that is worthy of them."

Mr. Blair, whose country currently holds the six-month presidency of the EU, stressed that European efforts to break the deadlock in the peace process must be "complementary" to U.S. mediating initiatives.

He stressed that both Britain and the EU intended "to play an active role," but with "both humility and an understanding of the limitations, because it is... important that we act complementary to the efforts that the U.S. is making."

Tel Aviv has rejected a recent U.S. proposal for an Israeli withdrawal from a further 13 per cent of the West Bank, insisting that it will only accept a nine per cent withdrawal.

A fresh American initiative is expected to be forwarded by U.S. peace envoy Dennis Ross, wbo will visit the region next week.

King Hussein said the agreement on British-ruled Northern Ireland, reacbed on April 11 between London and Dublin after 28 years of conflict, was "a good omen" and he hoped that "the current visit of the prime minister to the area at a very, very critical time will help us move ahead."

Mr. Blair, wbo visited Amman on the third leg of his first Middle East tour since he was elected prime minister in January last year, pledged "to do whatever I can, in both my capacities as British prime minister but also as president of the EU, to try and make progress in the Middle East peace process."

"We cannot draw easy comparisons or parallels between two different situations," be said, referring to the Northern Ireland question and the Mideast peace process.

"But one common lesson there is... and that is that these situations, difficult as they are over many, many years, can only be resolved through willingness to resolve them."

Mr. Blair's four-day tour of the Middle East started in Cairo on Friday, and included visits to Saudi Arabia, Israel and Palestinian self-rule areas.

He was expected to reassert Europe's impatience with Israeli policies towards the Palestinians and the EU's opposition to Jewish settlement building in talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu later Sunday (See separate story).

The Labour leader told reporters here prior to his departure to Jerusalem that "in the end, the best security for Israel and everybody in this region is a peace process that works."

"I would say it is ultimately the best security for the world," be added.

He expressed determination "to make sure that a process is under way that gives confidence to people that there can be some solutions.

"We know bow important that is, not just for the people of the region, but for the stability of the world," he said.

Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations froze last Marcb, following the decision by the Likud-led government of hard-line Netanyahu to start construction works for a Jewish settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, in Arab east Jerusalem.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook infuriated Israeli officials in March, when he met Palestinian leaders on a visit to Jebel Abu Ghneim, to assert Europe's opposition to Israeli settlement policies and reiterate that Tel Aviv must carry out long overdue troop withdrawals from the West Bank.

On the bilateral level, King Hussein and Mr. Blair hailed the strong relations between the two countries and expressed their willingness to expand cooperation.

"Our relations with Britain are traditionally strong and we are proud of them," the King said, adding that Jordanian-British cooperation "had achieved several objectives."

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Officials: King sent formal letter of protest to Netanyahu

By Alia A. Toukan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN - Israel's refusal to commit to U.S. proposals on a second troop withdrawal from the West Bank prompted His Majesty King Hussein to send a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu warning him of the danger the deadlock in the peace process poses to Jordan and the region, official sources said Monday.

The letter, his second in a year, was sent to Mr. Netanyahu on Friday, a day after King Hussein held a surprise meeting with the Israeli premier in Eilat.

"His Majesty was not satisfied with the outcome of Thursday's talks with Mr. Netanyahu and decided to send him a formal letter of protest," one official source told the Jordan Times yesterday.

King Hussein implied in the letter that Jordan would be the first country to suffer from a continuing impasse, according to another source.

Though the officials described the Eilat talks as "very cordial," they said the letter reflected the King's growing impatience with Mr. Netanyahu's policies, including desperate attempts to convince Amman of the reasons behind Israel's refusal to accept U.S. withdrawal proposals to help breathe life into the Palestinian-Israeli track, stalled for the past 15-months.

"His Majesty was particularly angered by Mr. Netanyahu's attempts to convince him why Israel could not accept American proposals for a redeployment from 13 per cent of the West Bank at the Eilat talks" said one official.

The Israeli premier called for Thursday's meeting with King Hussein fuelling speculation that he had "something new and important to say," the source explained.

Instead, he said, Mr. Netanyahu showed up at the meeting armed with maps of the West Bank which he used to try to convince King Hussein of Israel's "security" concerns in giving up a further 13 per ceot of the West Bank to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

According to various sources, the Monarch insisted at the weekend meeting that Israel must live up to the Oslo and Hebron peace accords.

In the letter, the King also outlined all the terms of reference dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the agreements the Jewish state had signed with the Palestinians, and warned of the dire consequences if the stalemate persisted, one of the officials said.

In his first letter to Mr. Netanyahu, in March 1997, King Hussein blasted the Israeli prime minister's hard-line policies saying they were moving the region closer to a "blood bath."

Jordan fears that a further delay in resuming Israeli-Palestinian peace talks could only lead to political instability in the Kingdom, home to many Palestinian refugees and suffering from economic hardships.

Mr. Netanyahu's tough peace policies have given further ammunition to Jordanians opposing the Kingdom's 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

"We are constantly reminding everyone that Jordan is always the first to suffer if there is no movement on the peace track," one of the officials told the Jordan Times.

Israeli government officials have described the recent letter as "substantive and friendly." But a Jordanian official responded by saying that this is an attempt at putting "a happy face," on an otherwise serious incident.

Weizman: Settler's death was politically motivated

MAON (AFP) — Israeli President Ezer Weizman said Monday that the killing of a Jewish settler by Arabs in the West Bank was a terror attack and not a land dispute as claimed by police, Israel Radio reported.

"I have no doubt that this act was politically motivated," Mr. Weizman said during a visit to the scene of the gun battle Sunday that left two other settlers and one Palestinian wounded, the radio said.

Dov Driban, 28, was killed after be and another settler ordered eight Palestinian bedouins to stop grazing their flocks near their ranch outside the West Bank settlement of Maon, south of Hebron.

According to accounts of the incident, Driban pulled out his pistol and in an ensuing scuffle the Palestinians wrestled the weapon away and shot him and the other Israeli. A third settler then arrived at the scene with an M-16 automatic rifle and shot one of the Palestinians, wounding him seriously. Israeli police and officials of the Shin Bet internal security agency deemed that the killing was a criminal act linked to a long-standing land dispute and not a politically motivated attack. But right-wing ministers disagreed and said the incident should be treated as a terrorist attack.

Bedouins from the nearby village of Yana have complained for months that Driban and the two other settlers had illegally set up a ranch on Arab-owned land outside Maon and then harassed shepherds who traditionally led their flocks through the area. In response to Sunday's killing, militant Israelis tried to set up a new settlement on the site Monday by placing two mobile homes there, army officials said.

The army said the mobile homes were unauthorised and soldiers quickly encircled the site to prevent settlers from bringing in more vehicles.

Settlers also set four bedouin tents ablaze early Monday near Maon, police said.

Euro-Med officials call for Palestinian state — draft

PALMA DE MAJORCA (R) — Senior officials from 11 Mediterranean countries holding talks on the Spanish island of Majorca on Monday condemned Israel's settlement policy and called for the creation of a Palestinian state.

A draft communiqué obtained by Reuters and to be presented to the Mediterranean forum, a grouping of European and North African nations, urges Israel to withdraw troops from occupied Palestinian lands in compliance with the Oslo peace accord.

The document, which must still be endorsed by foreign ministers attending the two-day conference set to begin on Monday, expressed "deep concern for the prolonged stagnation of the Middle East peace process".

The officials also said the continued deadlock carried "major risks of regional destabilisation."

Preparation of the forum's communiqué coincided with a visit to Israel by Britisb Prime Minister Tony Blair, representing the European Union, to try to restart peace talks stalled since Marcb 1997.

Negotiations ground to a halt after Israel began building a Jewish settlement on occupied Arab land in Jerusalem. Palestinian suicide bombings and disputes over Israeli troop redeployment deepened the crisis.

Ensour: Draft press law ready

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The government on Monday said that it has drafted a new press and publications law which will replace the 1993 law, pledging that the new legislation will afford the media more freedom.

Speaking to reporters during the weekly briefing, Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour said that the draft law will be submitted for debate to the Lower House during an upcoming extraordinary session expected "by the mid of this summer."

Drafting the law comes less than a week after His Majesty King Hussein called on Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali to introduce a new law that would replace the existing 1993 legislation.

The King's request, addressed in a letter to Dr. Majali last Wednesday, stressed on preventing daily and weekly newspapers from publishing articles that adversely affect Jordan's ties with Arab countries, especially the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

"I expect your government to take the necessary measures in submitting a new press and publications draft law that would deter anyone from harming Jordan's relations with Arab states or adversely affecting national unity," the letter read.

Dr. Majali replied by saying that the government will "undertake the necessary legislation" as soon as possible.

Dr. Ensour, Saturday, said that "the draft law offers more freedom to the media, a larger role to the judiciary with more transparency and clarity."

"It will not allow the executive authority to gain more power [over the press] but it will give no room for those [journalists] whose loyalty is not to Jordan... loyalty to the country is a holy issue," the deputy prime minister said.

Dr. Ensour, however, did not elaborate on the articles of the draft law, which according to media reports endorse higber fines against newspapers that violate it and impose more restrictions on the required qualifications of editors in cbief.

"The draft law is not an amendment to the previous one but a comprehensive and progressive law," Dr. Ensour added.

"The draft law is aimed at taking away the government's hand from issuing provisions and administrative decisions against press institutions," he added.

Meanwhile, commenting on the government's decision on Thursday to ban Al Jazirah Television and the Laebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) from transmitting two separate reports on a press conference held by opposition parties, the minister said that the ban was "within the laws of the Kingdom."

"We are not part of the dispute between the PNA and Hamas. This is an entirely Palestinian issue and it is very sensitive" he added, referring to the dispute between the PNA and Hamas over the killing of a top Hamas leader on March 29.

During Wednesday's conference, a coalition of 12 Jordanian parties criticised the PNA's mass arrests of Hamas activists in the self-rule areas.

"We will abide by His Majesty's message in letter and spirit," Dr. Ensour said.

"The King's message is not material for debate and discussion. The Royal letter is an order which we implement. There is no concession on such issues," he added.

Jordan urges neighbours to stop infiltration attempts

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour on Monday urged neighbouring countries to refrain from allowing armed groups to infiltrate into Jordan.

Dr. Ensour, wbo said the Kingdom wants to maintain good ties with all Arab neighbours, was responding to a question on what measures Jordan would take to prevent the infiltration of "armed groups from Syria" by saying: "These missions will not disturb us and we hope that they do not exist."

He refrained from naming any country.

"These are not missions of goodwill. We do not want to point the finger at this state or that. All attempts that were aimed at hurting the country have failed," the official, who is also the minister of information, said.

"One of the pillars of our foreign policy is not to interfere in other countries' inter

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LIGHT FROM THE TOMB OF CHRIST: Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theodoros the First holds large candles Saturday as he is carried in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the traditional ceremony of the Holy Fire, as hundreds of Orthodox faithful try to get fire from his candle. The Orthodox religious procession starts as Theodoros exits with fire from the site of the traditional Tomb of Jesus Christ within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Today, Christians in Jordan celebrate Easter Sunday (Reuters photo)

Qatari minister in Syria to improve strained ties

'We cannot continue to have any type of ties with Israel while the peace process remained frozen'

DAMASCUS (R) — Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Ben Jassim Ben Jabr Al-Thani opened talks in Damascus on Friday, signalling an end to diplomatic strains over a conference in Doha that was attended by Israel and boycotted by Syria.

He told reporters on arrival that Qatar might order Israel to close its commercial office in Doha as a mark of displeasure over its stalling in peace talks.

Welcoming Sheikh Hamad at the airport Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al Sharaa said the dispute about November's Doha conference for regional economic cooperation was now ended.

"We are confident that the reasons which made ties cool for some time are now over. We will discuss this issue during the meetings this evening and tomorrow," Mr. Sharaa said.

Syria led a campaign for the boycott of the conference, accusing the Israeli government of blocking the peace process.

Ties between Syria and Qatar began to improve last month when Mr. Sharaa took part in a meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference that was held in Doha.

Sheikh Hamad said in his remarks on Friday that Qatar was considering the closure of an Israeli commercial office in Doha because of the Israeli government's attitude towards peace.

The Arab-Israeli peace talks, which made good progress when the Israeli government was led by the Labour Party, came to a stalemate when Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu of the Likud Party took office in June 1996.

"All the signs coming from the Israeli government make us think seriously about closing the Israeli commercial office. We want the Israelis to understand that we cannot continue to have any type of ties while the peace process remained frozen," Sheikh Hamad said.

"We are studying this issue at present and hope there would be some kind of movement because we opened the office when the peace process was going well. If this process stops the reason for the opening of the office will disappear," he added.

The Qatari minister said his country supported Lebanon in rejecting Israel's offer for conditional withdrawal from south Lebanon in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 425.

"The Security Council resolution is clear. It calls for unconditional withdrawal by the Israelis from south Lebanon. There is no need for any conditions," Sheikh Hamad said.

Syria, the main foreign power in Lebanon where it has some 35,000 troops, and Beirut have rejected the Israeli offer saying Lebanon would not give the Jewish state any security guarantees in return for pullback.

60 arrested as Turk police disperse Islamist protest

ANKARA (AFP) — More than 60 people were arrested on the third straight day of protests in southeastern Turkey Saturday when police broke up a demonstration of Islamists chanting anti-secular slogans, the Anatolia news agency said.

Hundreds of people took part in the demonstration in the town of Batman to protest against planned prison sentences for those violating a secular dress code, it said.

In two other protests in the region Friday, one in Batman and the other in the nearby town of Solhan, five police officers were slightly injured when demonstrators hurled stones at them. Some 130 people were arrested.

On Thursday in Batman, police broke up a demonstration by some 4,000 Islamic students and their families protesting an official circular forbidding girls in state religious schools from wearing the Islamic veil.

Those were the first arrests outside Istanbul in connection with the circular issued early last month by the education ministry limiting the wearing of the veil to classes on the Koran in state religious schools.

Since Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's secular government came to power last June, several universities and ministries have distributed circulars reminding people of secular laws on the books.

These laws ban wearing of the Islamic veil at universities and public functions on the contention they are ostentatious signs of Islamic ideas. Although the laws were on the books, they were never strictly applied until the arrival of Mr. Yilmaz's government.

Mr. Yilmaz said last month that prison sentences would be brought for those violating the secular dress code.

Strict anti-Islamic measures followed last year's collapse of an Islamist-led government which was accused by Turkey's powerful pro-secular military of encouraging religious fundamentalism.

42 refugees detained in Turkey

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish authorities Saturday detained 42 people, mainly Iraqi Kurds and Iranians, in the country's northwest as they were preparing to illegally enter Greece, local officials said. The illegal immigrants were detained in two buses near the Greek border in the province of Edirne, they said. Three Turkish refugee smugglers, who reportedly took some $2,000 from each immigrant for the trip to Greece, were arrested. Turkish authorities prevented more than 5,000 people, mainly from Iraq and other developing Asian countries, from entering Greece illegally. But thousands of others managed to make their way to Turkey's northwestern neighbour.

Ankara to seek death sentence for Sakik

ANKARA (AFP) — A former top commander of Turkey's separatist Kurdish rebels, who was captured in northern Iraq recently, could face a death sentence in his upcoming trial, a Turkish prosecutor said Saturday.

"Semdin Sakik's crimes deserve the death sentence and I will demand capital punishment against him when his trial opens," the state security prosecutor in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir, Nihat Cakar, told the private television channel NTV.

Sakik, former commander of the separatist Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) in southeastern Turkey, last month surrendered to an Iraqi Kurdish group in northern Iraq after a dispute with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

But on Monday a Turkish marine team captured Sakik in the northern Iraqi town of Dohuk and brought him to Turkish territory by helicopter. He has been interrogated by intelligence officials in Diyarbakir since then.

Sakik has personally been blamed for the 1993 killing of 33 unarmed Turkish soldiers travelling in a bus in the southeast.

Ocalan and Sakik had been at odds over the PKK's strategies in recent months. Turkish newspapers alleged that the two men had been competing for the group's leadership.

But on March 16 Sakik quit the PKK and surrendered to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), a leading Iraqi Kurdish group controlling the Iraqi side of the border with Turkey.

Turkish officials said the operation to capture Sakik followed the KDP's rejection of Turkish requests for his extradition.

The KDP protested against the move, saying Sakiks's abduction could damage the normally good relations between the Iraqi Kurd group and Ankara.

Sakik's defection and capture is viewed as a major blow to the PKK, which has been fighting the Ankara government since 1984 for a Kurdish homeland.

In victory for N. Ireland's Trimble

Main Protestant party backs power-sharing with Catholics

BELFAST (AP) — Northern Ireland's main Protestant party swallowed its misgivings Saturday and voted to back a peace agreement to share power with Catholics.

The Ulster Unionist Party's governing council voted 540-210 in favour of the deal, matching the optimistic predictions of party leader David Trimble.

"The door is open. I expect the rest of the (Protestant) community to come through it with us," Mr. Trimble told a news conference immediately after the vote.

Meanwhile in Dublin, the party associated with the Irish Republican Army put off its decision on whether to support the agreement.

Gerry Adams, leader of the IRA-allied Sinn Fein party, applauded the Ulster Unionist vote. "Well done, David," he said at the start of his address to his party's annual conference.

The vote was a victory for Mr. Trimble, who had staked his political career on persuading his divided party to back the deal. The decision also makes it more likely that the deal will be approved in a May 22 referendum for all voters.

Mr. Trimble challenged the IRA-allied Sinn Fein party to give up its weapons. "Are they prepared to finally and irrevocably renounce violence? There is no more time for equivocation, it's time for them to speak," he said.

Amid signs of dissent, Sinn Fein had burly minders bar outspoken critics of the accord from entering the conference hall Saturday.

One of them, Sinn Fein Councillor Francie Mackey, said many party supporters have "serious reservations about the overall process, because it did not contain the dynamic to deliver on any of the main demands of Sinn Fein," including an end to Northern Ireland's existence as a state separate from the rest of Ireland.

Mr. Mackey and other members of a splinter Sinn Fein faction calling themselves the "32-County Sovereignty Committee," in reference to the number of counties in both parts of Ireland, had their party membership suspended last week.

Like the Ulster Unionists, Sinn Fein is considered crucial to the success of the agreement.

If the April 10 deal is approved, the British-rule province will get its own legislature which will be obliged to cooperate with the Republic of Ireland on some issues affecting the whole island. To gain support from the IRA and pro-British paramilitary groups, the agreement promised to speed up the release of prisoners.

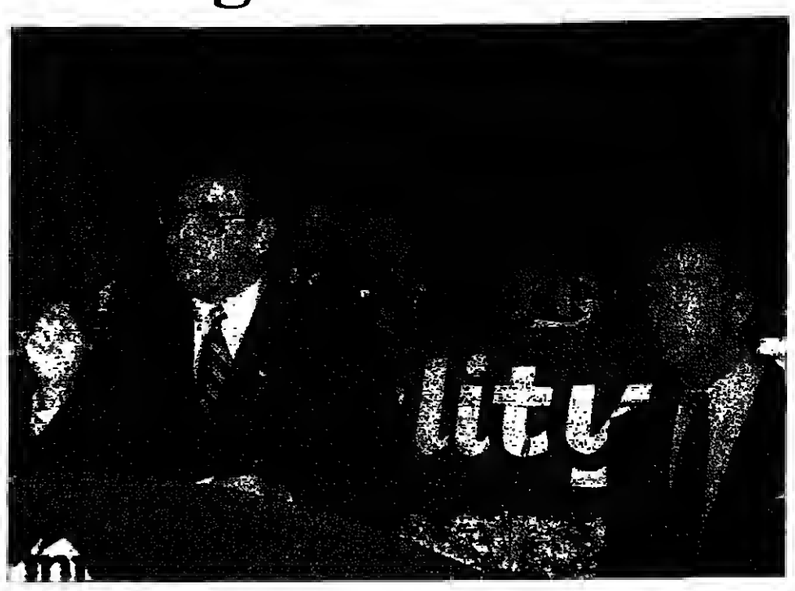
The Irish government, yielding to a key Unionist demand, will hold a referendum on amending its constitution to drop its claim on the territory of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Trimble, a 54-year-old law profession who became Ulster Unionist leader three years ago, is likely to lead the new assembly.

He says the agreement has secured Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom, and will force the IRA's allies to accept, for the first time, that there will be no united Ireland until a majority of Northern Ireland's people want it.

He dislikes some parts of the deal — the accelerated release of prisoners, the international commission to recommend changes in the provincial police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and another commission looking at the justice system.

But most of the prisoners would be released within two years anyway, he says, and Prime Minister Tony Blair's government will press ahead with the police and justice reviews whether or not the agreement survives.



U.S. Congressman Peter King, left, addresses the Sinn Fein annual conference in Dublin, Ireland, Saturday, watched by fellow Congressman Richie Neal, right. The conference passed an emergency motion to reconvene within a month to decide on the Northern Ireland peace pact — if necessary. Party spokesmen stressed that the two-day annual meeeting could still reach a decision following a full debate on the issue during this conference, but said the option to return to the question was being retained (AP photo)

Turin Shroud on view for faithful

TURIN (AFP) — The Turin Shroud was on public view Saturday for the first time since 1978, with an estimated three million people expected to see the relic in the next two months.

The archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Giovanni Saldarini, Saturday led the first group of faithful past the relic, kept under heavy guard in a two-tonne showcase whose atmosphere is computer-controlled.

On May 24, Pope John Paul II is scheduled to view the shroud, which some believe was used to wrap the body of Jesus Christ after he was taken down from the cross.

The linen shroud measures 436 by 110 centimetres (14 feet four inches by three feet seven inches) and bears the imprint of a bearded man with apparent wounds to his hands and feet.

It was the first public showing of the controversial relic since scientific tests carried out for the Roman Catholic Church in 1988 on samples of the shroud indicated that it dated from the Middle Ages.

The Catholic Church officially accepted the verdict, though conservatives and some scientists have recently questioned the reliability of carbon-dating.

Revered by Roman Catholics since the 14th century, the shroud has been unfolded and stretched out on a steel frame after centuries folded up in a traditional reliquary.

As 50 guards stood by, the faithful filed past the relic in the Turin cathedral under soft lighting designed to preserve the mysterious image on the fabric.

People wishing to view the relic must make reservations, part of the security arrangements implemented to protect the shroud.

Giuseppe Ghiberti, one of the organisers of the exhibition, said a mixture of inert gases based on argon would be pumped into the showcase to protect the shroud from oxidisation, moisture and bacteria.

Iran welcomes ceasefire in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (AFP) — The Iranian foreign ministry Saturday hailed the Taleban's commitment to a U.S.-brokered ceasefire in Afghanistan as a step toward ending the 18-year-long civil war, Radio Tehran reported.

"If the Taleban agree to a truce and negotiations with the opposition this will be a positive development," ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi said.

Iran "still wanted a truce and inter-Afghan talks to halt the crisis," he was quoted by the radio as saying.

Tehran "is ready to cooperate with the United Nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference" to help, he added.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, the most senior Western official to visit Afghanistan in 20 years, announced Friday he had secured a 10-day ceasefire and an agreement from the Afghan opposition forces and the Taliban to hold talks by April 27.

The talks would be held under the auspices of the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

He cobbled together the agreement after meeting separately with the Puritanical Muslim Taleban, which controls more than two thirds of Afghanistan, and their northern opponents, former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, ethnic-Uzbek warlord Abdul Rasheed Dostum and the leader of the Shiite Hezb-e-Wahdat faction, Karim Khalili.

Mr. Richardson later went to Pakistan, where his visit included talks on Afghanistan.

Pakistan is considered the chief backer of the Sunni Muslim Taleban while Shiite Muslim Iran supports an anti-Taleban alliance and still recognizes the ousted Mr. Rabbani as Afghan president.

The Taleban, or "theology students," drove Mr. Rabbani from the capital, Kabul, in September 1996 and are pushing to seize the rest of the country and set up an Islamic state.

U.N. envoy to Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi said in Tehran Tuesday that a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan will not be possible without the cooperation of both Pakistan and Iran.

"The problem of peace in Afghanistan is first of all the problem of its neighbours. Since Iran and Pakistan refuse to pull in the same direction, there will be problems," Mr. Brahimi told AFP.

He added that a rapid end to the conflict depended on Afghanistan's neighbours halting weapons shipments to the warring parties.

Iran's special envoy for Afghanistan, Allaedin Borujerdi, said Sunday that it was too optimistic to expect a quick end to the conflict.

Since there is no consensus among the countries in the region against a military solution, and in support of inter-Afghan negotiations and a coalition government, it would be too optimistic to speak of a quick end to the conflict, he said during talks with Mr. Brahimi.

Cyprus expels Japanese cultist

LARNACA (R) — Police in Cyprus expelled a leading member of the Japanese Aum Shinri Kyo (supreme truth) doomsday cult on Saturday, deeming him "too dangerous" to stay on the Mediterranean island.

Toshiyasu Ouchi, 45, left Larnaca International Airport at 0800 GMT on a Cyprus Airways flight to Paris.

The Japanese national, wanted in Japan on suspicion of killing a fellow cult member in 1989, spent the night at Nicosia central prison after being arrested by police at midday on Friday.

"He is accompanied by a (Cyprus) police officer and two Japanese officials. Arrangements are being made for his transfer to Japan from Paris," a police source told Reuters.

Witnesses said Mr. Ouchi was taken to Larnaca, on the south eastern coast of Cyprus, about three hours before his departure. He was put onto the aircraft before any of the other passengers.

Mr. Ouchi is on a Japanese nationwide wanted list on suspicion of conspiring to kill fellow cult member Shuji Taguchi, 21, in 1989. The man was throttled to death with a rope.

The Japanese branch of Interpol informed Cyprus about the fugitive on April 2. Cyprus authorities put Mr. Ouchi under surveillance, but were hampered by the lack of an extradition treaty between the two countries.

However, information that Mr. Ouchi was planning to flee Cyprus on Friday afternoon for a third, unknown destination prompted Cypriot authorities to act.

In an immigration department order, they cancelled a three-month resident's permit Mr. Ouchi had secured when he arrived on the island from Russia on March 12. It also described him as "persona non grata."

"This measure was taken because he is considered a dangerous person and consequently, an unwanted one," said a police statement.

It added that Mr. Ouchi was considered to be a leading member of the "terrorist organisation" and faced charges of murder and other serious offences in Japan.

Aum Shinri Kyo was responsible for releasing sarin gas in Tokyo's subway in March 1995, killing 12 people and making thousands ill.

Japanese media have reported that Mr. Ouchi had been under investigation by the Russian authorities on suspicion of trying to revive the cult's activities in that country.

Dubai wins world record for serving biggest breakfast

DUBAI (AP) — Thousands of people poured into the Dubai Creek Park Friday for a special breakfast — the biggest ever served. Over 14,000 people participated in the event. Some 250 volunteers banded out plastic bowls of cereal from behind a 100-metre table that was laid out with 1,500 boxes of the company's different brands. That came to about 15 million pieces of cereal. But Dubai is hungry for more. On Thursday, it attempted to build the world's largest globe out of balloons.

Cheap AI?

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Vice President Al Gore on Friday faced sharp criticism for his meager contributions to charity. Gore gave just $353 to charity in 1997, according to his income tax return, which shows the vice president made nearly $200,000. President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary were more generous, giving away some $270,000, including the revenues from her book "It Takes A Village." The Clintons declared income of $569,511. The Republican National Committee promptly dubbed Gore "Cheap Al," stressing that Clinton's beir designate gave just 0.0017 per cent of his income to charity, in contrast to an average U.S. rate of 2.2 percent.

Naked students may be stripped of run

ANN ARBOR (AFP) — Female University of Michigan students planning to take part in the annual Nude Mile run celebrating the end of the academic year should reconsider, officials here say. Police report an increasing number of incidents of spectators groping women runners and making lewd comments as the event has grown larger and rowdier in recent years. Last year, about 10,000 people watched a group of about 1,000 students, mostly graduating seniors, run naked across the university campus. Officials say some people took videos of the run and later sold them by advertising "Fresh Naked College Girls" on the Internet.

American inherits title of world's oldest person

LONDON (AFP) — A 117-year-old American woman has inherited the title of "World's Oldest Living Person" after the death of a Canadian woman 26 days her senior, the Guinness Book of Records said Friday. Sarah Clark, who was born on September 24, 1880, in Pennsylvania in the United States, has taken over the title from Marie Louise Febronie Meilleur of Canada, who died Thursday, said Guinness. According to Meilleur's daughter Olive Thierren, her mother died peacefully Thursday afternoon at the Nipissing Manor nursing home. "She's been very well until last week," said Therrien, 78. "She got a blood clot in her leg and it moved from her leg into her lung."

Archbishop boycotts baseball

NEW YORK (AFP) — The Roman Catholic archbishop of New York, John O'Connor, will boycott baseball games this year because the major leagues played on Good Friday, media reports said. "I will not go to a game because major league teams played on Good Friday," he was quoted as saying in Friday's edition of the New York Post. O'Connor is known for being a big baseball fan. "I love the Yankees. I love the Mets. I love baseball," he noted in his weekly column in Catholic New York, a church publication.

King, Queen meet with French tourism minister

AMMAN (J.T.) — Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor met Monday with French Minister of Tourism Michelle Demessine to discuss enhancing French support and cooperation in the fields of tourism and the preservation of Jordan's archaeological heritage, according to a press release.

King Hussein presented Mrs. Demessine with Al Kawkab medal.

According to Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji, the Jordanian Season in France, which was inaugurated by Queen Noor and Madame Chirac in March 1997, and the Jordanian cultural exhibition at the Institute of the Arab World, which was opened by King Hussein, Queen Noor and President Chirac last June, resulted in "an increase of 16 per cent in the number of French tourist nights in 1997 compared to 1996."

The French government has supported the restructuring of the Ammoun Hospitality and Tourism College, has donated $660,000 in equipment and will fund the expenses of two experts. The college, which will officially open next September, will offer a two-year diploma in hotel management as well as six-month courses for tourism guides who have a university degree in archaeology, the statement continued.

According to the president of the Hotel Association in Jordan, Michael Nazzal, "all students of the college will take French language courses and those trained in hospitality will learn French cuisine."

Mrs. Demessine will also be looking into the development of Iraq Al Amir, the site of a second century B.C. palace and of a historic village that the Noor Al Hussein Foundation has renovated and transformed into an income-generating handicrafts village. The French government will continue its help in restoring Jordanian archaeological sites and in providing training for the protection of its antiquities, according to the announcement.

According to Mr. Biltaji, the French company ACCOR, which owns around 3,000 hotels and spas throughout the world, will sign agreements soon with the Jordan Tourism Investments Company for the management of the Main Spa Village, the Dead Sea, Taybet Zaman and Nawafel.

HRH Prince Ali, Mr. Biltaji, French Ambassador Bernard Bajolet and the French Director of Tourism Hugues Parant attended the meeting with the King and Queen, the statement concluded.

Her Majesty Queen Noor guides former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev into the Institute of Diplomacy in Amman on Monday (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

King, Queen receive former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev

AMMAN (J.T.) — Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor on Monday received President and Mrs. Mikhail Gorbachev at Bab Al Salam, where King Hussein presented the former Soviet leader with Al Nahda medal.

HRH Prince Ali also attended the meeting.

Earlier yesterday, Queen Noor stressed that clarity of vision, courage and commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts are the leadership skills that the United Nations University/International Leadership Academy (UNU/ILA) seeks to promote.

Welcoming Mr. Gorbachev before a lecture he delivered on Monday as part of a UNU/ILA joint programme with the Gorbachev institute, Queen Noor announced that the ILA will be hosting the second international leadership programme this July.

She said the programme will comprise "four weeks of interactive seminars and workshops on peace, security and global leadership challenges."

The Queen, who is the chair of the UNU/ILA's advisory board, added that the academy will introduce "in early 1999 an eight-week advanced leadership programme incorporating independent research on a particular global issue, as well as an extended leadership travel programme."

In addition to yesterday's joint programme with the Gorbachev Institute, "the ILA has co-sponsored an international conference on mediation and conflict resolution in Northern Ireland as well as a global leadership week at the University of Maryland last November," the Queen said.

Addressing the conference, which was also attended by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, the Queen paid tribute to Mr. Gorbachev, a 1990 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, for "his leading role in introducing innovative political and economic reforms to the former Soviet Union.

"Since the late 1980s, perestroika [economic restructuring] and glasnost [political and cultural liberalisation, openness] have resulted in significant transformations on the world political and socio-economic map," she noted.

Former Foreign Minister Kamel Abu Jaber, who heads the Institute of Diplomacy, where the lecture was held, described Mr. Gorbachev as "the leader of the second Russian revolution, a bloodless revolution which ushered Russia into the 21st century."

In his lecture, Mr. Gorbachev analysed the challenges related to the globalisation process.

He later addressed a press conference, but the Jordan Times reporter was denied entrance.

The UNU/ILA is the first global leadership training facility and the first U.N. institution to be initiated and established in the Middle East.

Dr. Majali started championing the idea of such an institution 15 years ago.

Queen, Cherie Blair visit Business Women Club

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor on Sunday received the wife of the British prime minister, Cherie Blair, at the headquarters of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women Club (BPWC), where Mrs. Blair was briefed on the club's legal consultative services, small business counselling and the business incubator programme, according to a press release.

Queen Noor, who is the honorary president of the BPWC federation, noted that the centre is an "example of intersectoral cooperation, where the government, non-governmental institutions and the private sector work closely together to promote and expand legal services and business opportunities for women."

According to a spokesperson for the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Blair, who is a lawyer by profession, expressed her interest in the legal services available to women in Jordan and expressed her admiration for the work done by the BPWC and the Noor Al Hussein Foundation (NHF).

According to the BPWC's Legal Counselling coordinator, Butheina Jardaneh, the BPWC's legal consultative services were established in 1984 to raise awareness of women's legal and constitutional rights, extend individual free legal advice (with help from the Ministry of Social Development) and follow up through out-of-court settlements or court action. The legal services benefit around 700 women annually, with nearly 180 cases taken to court, the statement said.

The centre, which has a hotline, also holds seminars and workshops on laws and policies affecting the personal status of women that range from marriage, divorce and custody matters to economic and social rights.

The visit of Queen Noor and Mrs. Blair to the BPWC ended with a presentation by NHF Executive Director Sima Bahous on the foundation's national, regional and international projects in the fields of integrated community development and women and enterprise development.

Queen Noor and Mrs. Blair, who were accompanied by Jamie Majali, were received by Senator Subhieh Ma'ani and other members of the BPWC.

Later, Queen Noor hosted a lunch for Mrs. Blair at Al Ma'wa Palace, which was attended by Senator Leila Sharaf, Ruweidah Tarawneh, Mrs. Majali, In'am Mufti, Mrs. Battiscombe, Dr. Bahous and Asma Khader.

Parties must follow proper channels in proposing changes to elections law — Ensour

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Deputy Prime Minister and Information Minister Abdullah Ensour on Monday said all political forces and citizens are welcome to take part in a national debate over a much-awaited draft elections law.

However, any political party or group interested in formulating proposals should follow the proper constitutional channels, and all drafts must be reviewed by the government, Dr. Ensour told reporters at a regular press briefing.

He was referring to an alternative elections law that opposition parties said they were readying in response to a draft announced by the government last month.

"The Constitution stipulates that only the government or any [group of] ten or more senators or deputies may propose a law," Dr. Ensour said, adding that, also according to the Constitution, "any proposal must be referred to the government, which drafts it in the form of a draft law, and then submits it to the House."

The government of Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and the opposition have locked horns over the controversial one-person, one-vote system since it was introduced by a Royal Decree a few days ahead of the 1993 general elections.

The government has maintained that the one-person, one-vote system is more democratic than the previous multiple-vote arrangement, as it allows all voters to cast one ballot regardless of how many seats their constituencies are allocated.

But the coalition of 13 opposition parties, led by the powerful Islamic Action Front, has insisted that the formula encourages tribalism at the expense of political parties' representation in Parliament.

Nine of Jordan's 13 opposition parties boycotted last year's general elections, citing the one-person, one-vote system as one of the main reasons behind their decision.

When a draft elections law, prepared by the Ministry of Interior and currently being reviewed by the Prime Ministry, was published last month, the opposition parties accused the government of "bluffing" and said the government's draft included "only minor administrative changes."

They told the Jordan Times last week that they will soon publish their own alternative draft. The opposition's proposal is expected to replace the one-person, one-vote system with a proportional formula, which would give each party or coalition a percentage of parliamentary seats equal to the percentage of votes they obtained in the ballot.

Opposition leaders also said their draft law will strip the Ministry of Interior of its power to supervise the elections. It will instead appoint a "mixed" body comprising senior judges, representatives of political parties and civil society institutions, and government officials to supervise the whole election process, from registration to counting procedures.

Dr. Ensour confirmed that the government plans to submit its draft law to the 80-member Lower House of Parliament during an extraordinary session this summer.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ensour meets with visiting British admiral

AMMAN (Petra) — Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour Monday received British Deputy Chief of Staff Admiral Peter Abbott, with whom he reviewed bilateral military relations and means of future cooperation between the two countries. Dr. Ensour also reviewed the challenges facing the region and the important role Britain can play in overcoming the obstacles facing the Middle East peace process. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Mirai Kaabneh, also met with Admiral Abbott and reviewed the regional situation, in addition to issues of common concern.

April 27, 30 designated public holidays

AMMAN (Petra) — All ministries, government departments and public institutions will be closed on Monday, April 27, and Thursday, April 30, in observance of the new Hijra year and Labour Day, respectively, according to a communiqué issued by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali.

Salt awards JD409,000 contract for commercial complex

SALT (Petra) — The Salt Municipality has awarded a JD409,000 contract to a local contractor to construct a new commercial complex in the city centre, Salt Mayor Hani Khreisat said Monday. Mr. Khreisat said the 5,000-square metre building, which will include a parking lot, aims to provide enough space for commercial stores and help the municipality finance its projects, in addition to easing traffic jams in the crowded town.

Community school in Doha receives full accreditation

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Education has decided to accredit the Jordanian community school in the Qatari capital of Doha as a full-fledged Jordanian school, the ministry's director of education, Mahmoud Massad, said. He added that graduates from this school will be able to compete for university seats in Jordanian universities on an equal footing with students attending schools in Jordan.

what's going on

FILMS

* "Carry On... Abroad" at the British Council, Jabal Amman at 6:00 p.m. Also showing children's film "Camberwick Green" on Wednesday, April 22, at 5:00 p.m.
* German film "Alice in den Städten" (with subtitles in English) at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Amman at 6:30 p.m.
* German film "Der amerikanische Freund" at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman on Wednesday, April 22, at 7:00 p.m.

LECTURE

* "The EURO — Dawning of a New Leading Currency?" (in English) by Hans Pirner at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman at 6:30 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Works by Yassin Al Mohammadawi at the Orient Gallery, Shmeisani (Tel. 5681303/4), until May 7.
* Private collection of Jan Kassay entitled "Flowers Series" at the Jordan River Designs Project showroom, Jabal Amman (Tel. 4613081/2), until April 22.
* Photographic exhibition entitled "A Tour in the Dead Sea" by Jaussen and Savignac at the French Cultural Centre, until April 30.
* Paintings by Lebanese-American artist Etel Adnan entitled "Artist's Book of Art and Poetry" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until May 21. Also displaying works by Berlin-based Syrian artist Marwan Bashi entitled "A Suite of Heads," and works by contemporary Arab artists.
* Works by Maurice Haddad at Hammurabi Arts Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until April 22.
* Paintings on handmade paper at Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Saqra St. (Tel. 5699141/2), until April 25.

Pharmacists ask for government protection following more attacks

By Mohammad Ben Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Jordan Pharmacists Association (JPA) Monday reiterated its request that the government protect its members after a spate of recent attacks on pharmacies across the Kingdom blamed by officials on drug addicts.

JPA President Abdul Raheem Issa said two new attacks were committed against pharmacists in the past two weeks. The latest incidents came two months after one pharmacist was killed and another seriously injured in two separate attacks.

"The two incidents in February were not the only assaults against pharmacies," he told the Jordan Times. "There were two similar incidents in Amman and Salt recently."

"We want the government to take measures to protect pharmacies... we want police patrols to make regular visits, especially in remote areas," he added.

A pharmacy on Gardens Street was robbed on April 6, the eve of the Muslim 'Eid Al Adha (sacrifice feast).

"Money was stolen from a drawer while several drugs went missing," Mr. Issa said. "In the city of Salt, two young men, armed with knives, attacked a pharmacy and forced the pharmacist to give them money and drugs."

The incidents came three years after Jordan was rocked by the murder of three pharmacists in separate attacks. No arrests have been made in connection with the 1995 crimes.

Police reported that the two February attacks were carried out by the same person after tests by the criminal lab showed that the bullets fired came from the same gun.

According to Ministry of Health regulations, several narcotics and drugs, including anti-depressants and sleeping pills, cannot be sold without a doctor's prescription.

Hundreds of pharmacists took to the street in Amman in protest against the February attacks and asked the government to take extra measures to ensure their safety.

UNESCO delegation inspects NHF project

AMMAN (J.T.) — The UNESCO special ambassador for children in need, Mrs. Ohoven, UNESCO Deputy Director General Adnan Badran and their delegation visited the Noor Al Hussein Foundation (NHF) Quality of Life Project on Monday, according to an NHF press release.

Mrs. Ohoven and the delegation were received by NHF Executive Director Sima Bahous and other officials from the foundation at the Mukheibeh Village, where they were received by the Quality of Life Project's local committee and the Mother's Club.

The delegation were pleased by the various aspects of the project and the integration of the NHF's educational projects, namely the Performing Arts Centre, in the community, the statement said.

"Al Kanafeesh," the children's play, was performed as part of the Theatre-in-Education programme, as well as the interactive performance display for women, which discusses reproductive health, according to the announcement.

The delegation visited two families benefiting from the project activities and were then taken to the centre, where they witnessed the ways women have been mainstreamed into development with sensitivity to tradition.

They were presented with the project's various activities and their overall impact and benefit to the Mukheibeh community. Dr. Bahous explained the NHF's mission in seeking to improve the quality of life of Jordanians by responding to their different development needs and introducing innovative, dynamic and sustainable development models for the communities, the statement concluded.

Prime minister arrives in Tunis for Jordanian-Tunisian committee meeting

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali Monday arrived in Tunisia to head the Jordanian delegation to the Higher Joint Jordanian-Tunisian Committee, which convenes in the Tunisian capital today.

Dr. Majali and senior Tunisian officials are expected to discuss Arab and regional issues of common concern, including the stalled Middle East peace process and means of overcoming the obstacles facing it.

The prime minister was seen off by His Royal Highness Prince Faisal, Deputy Prime Minister and Information Minister Abdullah Ensour, and senior government officials.

Dr. Majali is accompanied by Foreign Minister Jawad Anani, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment Tawfiq Kreishan and Minister of Administrative Development Bassam Emousb.

Majali meets with French tourism minister

Prior to his departure, Dr. Majali met with visiting French Minister of Tourism Michelle Demessine and attended part of a meeting between Jordanian and French tourism officials and representatives of the tourist sector in Jordan.

The French minister arrived here on Sunday on a three-day visit for talks on tourism cooperation.

Dr. Majali praised the unique historic relations between Jordan and France, voicing hope that the visit by the French delegation will contribute to further strengthening bilateral ties.

Ms. Demessine stressed her country's full support for Jordan to help advance the tourism sector. She voiced hope that Jordan would be able to benefit from France's long experience in the tourism field. She added that her country is willing to hold training workshops for Jordanian personnel working in the tourism sector.

Tabloid writer released from detention

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The satirical writer at the tabloid weekly "Abed Rabboh," Yousef Gheishan, was released over the weekend after six days of detention.

Mr. Gheishan was arrested from his home at midnight Sunday, April 11, by security agents who he said searched his house and confiscated everything that had his handwriting on, as well as his files and archive.

No reason was given for the arrest at the time.

Mr. Gheishan, who is also a journalist working for the independent Arabic daily Al Arab Al Yawm, said his arrest was ordered by the military prosecutor general on charges of lese majeste and distribution of anti-government leaflets in the town of Madaba, southwest of Amman.

"I was surprised by the charges of heading an Islamic opposition group and distributing leaflets slandering the government and calling for a coup against it," said Mr. Gheishan, a converted Christian, stressing that he had no relation to any Islamic group.

He said he denied the charges against him in three interrogation sessions during his detention at the headquarters of the General Intelligence Department.

He said he was treated very well, and was released Saturday after charges against him were dropped.

"Most of my documents and articles were returned to me after my release, except a couple of books and several documents that remained with the intelligence department," he said.

Mr. Gheishan who also writes satirical columns for the weekly Al Bilad, said his arrest was only a warning to dissuade him from writing critical articles against the government.

He thanked Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Information Abdullah Ensour, who helped secure his release before the Easter holiday, and expressed appreciation to the media body as well and human rights organisations for their coverage and support.

In March, the editor of Abed Rabboh, Abdul Hadi Raji Majali, was detained by security forces for four days.

He said at the time that his arrest was because he ran a satirical picture of Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and Minister of Interior Nathir Rashid on the front page of the weekly's 47th issue.

Abed Rabboh, the only satirical weekly in Jordan, was the first to shut down after the government passed tough amendments to the 1993 temporary Press and Publications Law last May while Parliament was in recess.

The law was described both home and abroad as stifling "freedom of expression."

The weekly resumed publication in February after the law was annulled by the High Court of Justice and declared unconstitutional.

Algerian security forces kill 11 armed Islamists during operations — reports

ALGIERS (AFP) — Algerian security forces killed 11 armed Islamists during two operations east of the capital Algiers, the Liberte and Al Watan dailies reported.

The security forces killed eight of the Islamists in a weekend operation at Iakouren village in the Bouira district some 100 kilometres from the capital, Al Watan said, while Liberte said the other activists were killed in the Jijel coastal region further east.

A bomb hidden inside a handbag and found by children at the entrance to a building in the centre of the western city of Oran was defused on Sunday, the daily Al Khabar reported, for its part.

Armed Islamists have been waging a civil war against the Algerian authorities since the January 1992 cancellation of the second round of general elections the now outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win.

The Algerian government has said some 26,000 people have died in the conflict, but the U.S. State Department and human rights groups put the death toll at some 70,000.

While Islamist groups have been blamed for mass butchery of civilians in many attacks ranging from city car bombings to raids on isolated hamlets, international watchdog groups have also accused the authorities of major human rights violations.

Le Matin on Monday reported that security forces had nearly completed a major operation, carried out over several weeks, to track down a terrorist group of about a dozen people operating out of the sewers in the capital.

The group, held responsible for several attacks in Algiers, has been trapped by the closing of the sewers pending a final assault against them, "said to be imminent," the paper said.

BERBER ACTIVISTS DEMONSTRATE NEAR POLICE: **Berber activists Monday shout slogans next to riot police as they celebrate the 18th anniversary of the 'Berber Spring,' when tens of thousands of Algerian Berbers marched through central Algiers and towns in their northeast Kabylie region to demand official recognition of their language and culture. Berber activists commemorate the Berber Spring by recalling the suppression of April 20, 1980, of a popular protest called by the Berber Cultural Movement (Reuters photo)**

Free zone in Aqaba expected by Jan. 1999 — Ensour

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour on Monday said he expected that the Aqaba region will be converted into a free industrial zone by January 1999.

Dr. Ensour said a $1 million feasibility study was expected to be completed in the coming six months, adding that the government will need an additional three months to evaluate it.

"Aqaba will be a comprehensive free region, not only a storage area for goods," said the minister, who was speaking at a press conference.

"Once Aqaba becomes a free zone, it will have its own financial system, a different tax system and there will be no taxes on the banks that are working within the region, which will encourage the establishment of more banks there," Dr. Ensour said.

"The region will include a variety of sectors such as industry and agriculture as well," Dr. Ensour, who is also minister of information, said.

The minister said the exact area of the free zone has not been defined, adding that the study will determine if the Aqaba region or the entire governorate will be included in the proposed area.

Dr. Ensour said Thursday's Cabinet session in Aqaba, which was chaired by His Majesty King Hussein, focused on the development of the southern region, a major regional hub.

The region, which borders Saudi Arabia, Israel and Egypt, will also witness new joint projects between Jordan and a number of foreign investors.

Arafat to discuss stalled Middle East peace talks in S. Arabia

DUBAI (R) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat is set to hold talks in Saudi Arabia this week on U.S. and European efforts to revive the stalled Middle East peace process, Palestinian officials said Monday.

The officials at the Palestinian embassy in Riyadh said Mr. Arafat was due in the Red Sea city of Jeddah on Tuesday and over two days would meet senior Saudi leaders, including King Fahd.

"The president will discuss the latest developments in light of the U.S., British and European efforts to revive the peace process," one official said.

Mr. Arafat was on Monday meeting British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Gaza to discuss a possibility of London-based talks aimed at resuscitating the peace negotiations.

After talks with Mr. Blair on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu sprang a surprise when he said he was ready to go to London within the next month to try to break a deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Mr. Blair has indicated that any talks should be based on proposals drawn up by the United States.

Mr. Blair, touring the Middle East on behalf of the European Union, had held talks in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Habash accuses Israel of Sharif murder

DAMASCUS (AFP) — George Habash, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), accused Israel Monday of being behind the murder of Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) chief bomb maker Mohieddin Sharif.

In an open letter to Palestinian National Authority (PNA) President Yasser Arafat and Hamas founder and spiritual guide Ahmed Yassin, Mr. Habash said "Sharif's assassination occurred in the framework of criminal Zionist policy."

He reminded Mr. Arafat and Sheikh Yassin of "murders committed by Israel of dozens of Palestinian resistance fighters and intellectuals such as Ghassan Kanafani, Khalil Al Wazir, Abu Iyad, Fathi Shikaki and Yehiya Ayyash."

Mr. Habash, whose group rejects the Israeli-Palestinian autonomy accords, said Israel is trying "to divide the Palestinians to get them to kill each other."

He also called for the creation of an "independent legal body" to investigate Sharif's murder.

Rafsanjani under fire for backing Tehran mayor

TEHRAN (R) — Former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has come under fire in Iran for publicly defending the controversial mayor of Tehran.

A member of the conservative majority in parliament called the former president's remarks at Friday's prayer sermon at Tehran University, broadcast on state radio and television, "below Rafsanjani's dignity."

Mr. Rafsanjani, now chairman of a powerful state body that advises Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said in his sermon that political turmoil over the arrest and jailing of Mayor Gholamhossein Karbaschi on alleged graft offences was a bitter experience.

"How can Mr. Rafsanjani defend a detained suspect at a sacred place such as the Friday congregational prayers?," asked the parliament deputy, Ahmad Rasouli-Nejad from the district of Damavand and Firouzkouh near Tehran.

In remarks published in Monday morning newspapers, he said that, if such support for Mr. Karbaschi continued, he would disclose the names of people who had pocketed windfall wealth through connections with the mayor.

Mr. Karbaschi was freed on Wednesday after 11 nights in Tehran's Evin prison. Ayatollah Khamenei ordered his release after intervention by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, who said the mayor's detention was causing political problems.

Students and riot police clashed the day before the mayor's release during a demonstration in support of the mayor and hard-line activists disrupted a meeting held in his honour.

The mayor, who remains under investigation, returned to work at Tehran city council headquarters on Sunday.

The Persian-language daily newspaper Iran published by the official Islamic Republic News Agency said in a front-page editorial on Monday that Mr. Rafsanjani shortened his Friday prayers sermon when some people called for the mayor's execution and remained silent only to avoid tension and protect the unity of the nation.

"This silence was as powerful as the rage of the whole nation," it said.

The conservative daily newspaper Jomhuri Eslami called the hard-liners' disruption "a sinister and inauspicious initiative."

"If these political propaganda games continue, society will be more divided and dispersed... And this is against the interests of the revolution," it said.

Orthodox Christian leader blesses followers in Easter 'service of love'

ISTANBUL (AP) — Millions of Orthodox Christians across the world roasted lamb, dyed eggs and prayed for an end to hardship Sunday during Orthodox Easter celebrations.

"Let all partake of the banquet of the faith! Let all enjoy the riches of goodness," Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the Orthodox Church, said in his annual Easter message from Istanbul.

The Orthodox patriarch presides over 14 autonomous Orthodox churches, including those of Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Russia.

Some 300 million Orthodox Christians observed Sunday as the anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other Christians celebrated Easter a week earlier.

Orthodox believers schedule their religious observances according to the old Julian calendar, which marks both Christmas and Easter later than the rest of Christianity.

Thousands of Romanian churchgoers, clasping flickering candles, spilled into streets across Romania from churches overflowing with worshippers at midnight Mass.

"I wanted to be closer to God," said Camelia Gheorghiu, 38, attending church in the central Romanian city of Sibiu. "I wanted to take strength from the church to help my not very easy life."

Since 1989, when communism was toppled, there has been a resurgence in religion in Romania. Some 90 per cent of Romanians formally adhere to the Orthodox Church.

In Nicosia, Cyprus, thousands of Greek Cypriots prayed for the end of the Turkish occupation of the northern third of the island.

"On the day of Christ's resurrection we pray for the resurrection of Cyprus and the ending of our Calvary, the 24-year-long Turkish occupation of part our country," Archbishop Chrysostomos, head of the Cyprus Orthodox Church, said in a nationally televised message.

Israel reportedly opposes early release of Vanunu

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel will oppose the early release of nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu, jailed since 1986 for spilling Israel's nuclear secrets, newspaper reports said Monday.

Mr. Vanunu, who was held in solitary confinement until last month, is serving an 18-year prison term for giving information about Israel's nuclear programme to the Sunday Times of London. He is scheduled to have his first parole hearing on Wednesday.

The Haaretz newspaper said Nili Arad, the Israeli Justice Ministry's director general, will tell the parole board that Israel's defence establishment objects strenuously to Mr. Vanunu's early release because he continues to be a security risk.

The justice ministry refused comment on the reports, and Mr. Vanunu's lawyer could not immediately be reached for comment.

Also Monday, spokeswoman Orit Messer-Harel said the prison authority was considering suspending the visiting privileges of Mr. Vanunu's brother Asher, who gave an interview to the Sunday Times this week on behalf of his brother.

Ms. Messer-Harel said it was a "security problem" for Mr. Vanunu, whose access to the outside world has been severely restricted, to be quoted in the media. She said no action was planned against Mr. Vanunu himself, on the assumption that he didn't know his brother would pass his remarks on to the British newspaper.

Mr. Asher Vanunu said he asked his brother questions during a prison visit and didn't tell him that he would relay the information to the Times.

In the interview, Mr. Vanunu said he had acted out of concern for Israel when he gave the information to the paper 12 years ago.

"I wanted to save the population of Israel from the disaster of a nuclear war and they turned me into a traitor and a spy," Mr. Vanunu was quoted as saying.

Mr. Vanunu said his motives were humanitarian but that "the state turned me into a monster." "I say clearly that I did what I did from a deep internal conviction and I would do it again."

Russian ambassador meets Iraqi Kurd rivals

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Russian Ambassador Nikolai Kartuzov has met northern Iraq's rival Kurd leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, a newspaper reported on Monday.

Nabd Al Shabab, a weekly run by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's son Uday, said the aim of last week's meetings was to reconcile Mr. Barzani and Mr. Talabani and to "open channels of contact" between them and Baghdad.

The meeting with Mr. Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), took place in the KDP mountain stronghold of Salahuddin, and Mr. Kartuzov went to Qala Julan, near the city of Sulaymaniya, to meet Mr. Talabani, it said.

A Russian embassy spokesman confirmed that the ambassador visited northern Iraq but declined to give details.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Mr. Talebani, and the KDP have waged several rounds of fighting for control of northern Iraq since 1994, at a cost of more than 3,000 lives.

The Iraqi leadership has stepped up calls for the two groups, which shared control of Iraqi Kurdistan between 1991 and 1994 in defiance with Baghdad, to renew links with the central government.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Turkish plan to supply northern Cyprus with water delayed

ANKARA (AFP) — A Turkish plan to supply northern Cyprus with water has been delayed for two months, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Necati Utkan said Monday. Turkey, with the help of a Norwegian company, planned to use giant floating balloons to drag around seven million cubic metres across the Mediterranean to northern Cyprus. "The project, which was due to be launched on April 23, has been delayed until the beginning of June for technical reasons," said Mr. Utkan.

84 Iraqi Kurds detained on Greek island

ATHENS (AFP) — Eighty-four Iraqi Kurds and two Turks alleged to have helped them enter Greece illegally were arrested near Samos in the eastern Aegean, merchant navy ministry officials said Monday. The 53 men, 13 women and 18 children were detained at dawn by a port patrol at Agathonissi, a small island south of Samos. They were transferred to police headquarters on Patmos where they said they would seek political asylum, officials said.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION
Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO
16:10 .....Cartoon
16:30 .....French programmes
18:00 Quiz Show — Small Talk
18:30 ..Drama —Border Town
19:00 .....Le Journal
19:15 .....Doc. — Fractales
19:30 .....News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — Pride and Joy
20:00 .....What Would You Do?
20:30 .....Encounter
21:10 ..Drama —Acapolco Bay
22:00 .....News in English
22:30 Feature Film — "Barren"
23:59 .....Metro Cafe
00:30.....End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:34.....Fajr
05:56.....(Sunrise) Duha
12:34.....Dhuhr
16:12 .....'Asr
19:13.....Maghreb
20:35 .....'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811.
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifieh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
The American Orthodox Church Tel. 775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Temperatures are expected to drop slightly becoming below average by 3 degrees centigrade, skies partly cloudy to sunny, and winds northwesterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, skies will be northerly moderate to active, and seas calm.

Amman 10/20
Aqaba 15/31
Deserts 08/24
Jordan Valley 13/27

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 21, Aqaba 35 Humidity readings: Amman 42 per cent, Aqaba 19 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Wissam Hzayyin 748563
Dr. Abdul Hadi Tayyim 4620115
Dr. Omar Yassin 836221
Dr. Khalid Abdo 4657129
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy ..4637055
Al Salam pharmacy ...4636730
Yacoub pharmacy ... 4644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 4637660
Nairoukh pharmacy ..4623672
IRBID:
Dr. Mazen Abu Bakir ...276852
Al Quds pharmacy .....(—)

ZARQA:
Dr. Ziyad Jghaitim 992991
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre.....4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency.....199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade.....4617101
Blood Bank.....775121
Highway Police.....843402
Traffic Police.....896390
Public Security Dept.....4630321
Hotel Complaints.....5605800
Price Complaints.....5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints. 897267
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone
Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs.....5661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority ...815615
Electric Power Co..... 4636381
RJ Flight Information....44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport ...44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic, Abdli 5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 836813, 856856
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity.....4644281/6
Akileh Maternity.....4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman. 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5669131
University Hospital 535344
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777 (01/3
Al-Bashir.....775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5602240/50
Amal Hospital 5674155

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital .....(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital .....(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital .....(09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital .....(09)99099

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital .....(02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital .....(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital .....(02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA AIRPORT

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:30 .....Damacus (RJ)
07:45 .....Sanaa (RJ)
08:15 .....Aqaba (add) (RJ)
10:20 .....Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:25 .....Beirut (RJ)
10:30 ..... Jeddah (add) (RJ)
10:40 .....Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:50 .....Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
12:45 .....Luxor (add) (RJ)
17:05 .....Cairo (RJ)
18:30 ..Chicago, Amsterdam (RJ)
19:00 ..London, Frankfurt (RJ)
00:05 .....Milan (add) (RJ)
04:35 .....Paris (add) (RJ)

Other Flights
13:00 .....Riyadh (SV)
13:30 .....Aden (IY)
14:25 .....Munich (LH)
15:00 .....Istanbul (TK)
18:05 .....Kiev (6U)
18:30 ....Dubai, Damascus (EK)
19:00 .....Paris (AF)
20:25 .....Tel Aviv (LY)
21:10 .....Beirut (ME)
21:40 .....Cairo (MS)
23:35 .....Larnaca(CY)
23:40 .....Amsterdam (KL)
00:55 .....Bucharest (RO)
03:00 .....Rome (AZ)
04:25 .....London (BC)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
08:15 ....Amman (QALA) (RW)
19:20 .... Amman (QALA) (RW)
23:50 ...Amman (Marka Airport) (RW

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:00 .....Aqaba (add) (RJ)
06:45 .....Beirut (RJ)
08:50 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
09:00 .....Luxor (add) (RJ)
12:15 .....Brussels (RJ)
13:00 ....Vienna, Frankfurt (RJ)
13:00 .....Geneva, Madrid (RJ)
13:00 .....Paris (RJ)
13:15 .....Cairo (RJ)
14:00 .....London (RJ)
15:00 .....Milan (add) (RJ)
16:00 Aqaba, Paris (add) (RJ)
21:20 ..... Jeddah (RJ)
21:40 .....Damascus (RJ)
22:00 .Abu Dhabi , Dubai (RJ)

Other Flights
07:25 .....Frankfurt (LH)
14:30 .....Riyadh (SV)
1:30 .....Aden(IY)
15:15 .....Munich (LH)
16:00 .....Istanbul (TK)
19:05 .....Kiev (6U)
19:30 .....Dubai(EK)
21:10 .....Tel Aviv (LY)
22:40 .....Cairo (MS)
00:40...Beirut, Amsterdam (KL)
01:55 .....Bucharest (RO)
04:00 .....Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
06:00 .....Aqaba (RW)
17:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
21:30 .....Aqaba (RW)

Top official in Moscow to prepare Clinton-Yeltsin G8 meet

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his U.S. counterpart Bill Clinton will likely discuss disarmament issues on the sidelines of next month's G8 summit in an effort to clear the way for a Clinton visit to Moscow later in the year, U.S. officials said Monday.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, in charge of relations with former Soviet republics, is currently in Moscow preparing the agenda for the bilateral meeting during the May 16-17 summit of leading industrial nations.

"He's been preparing for Clinton and Yeltsin to meet on the sidelines of the G8 in Birmingham (England) next month," the official said.

"The White House is continuing to say that they would prefer the START II (treaty on nuclear disarmament) to be ratified before a Clinton visit" so that the two men could take disarmament talks further, the official said.

The situation "is still the same," he added.

Mr. Talbott later held talks with interim Russian Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko during which the Birmingham encounter and bilateral cooperation were discussed, Interfax reported.

Mr. Kiriyenko said despite the change in government "our commitment to continued reform remains unchanged," Interfax reported, and pledged to honour existing bilateral agreements with Washington.

Mr. Clinton insisted March 13 that Russia's lower house of parliament, the state Duma, ratify the START II treaty before he would consider attending a summit with Mr. Yeltsin in Moscow this year.

"It would occur after the Russian Duma ratified START II so that we could begin to work on START III and really ... take the next big step in lowering the nuclear weapons arsenals of both countries," he said.

START II, which provides for a two-thirds reduction in nuclear arsenals, was ratified by the U.S. Senate in January 1996 but has been blocked by Communist and nationalist deputies in Russia who say the accord puts Moscow at a disadvantage.

The treaty would leave Russia with 3,000 warheads by 2003, while the U.S. would be allowed to keep 3,500 nuclear warheads.

A week ago Mr. Yeltsin took ratification a step closer, presenting deputies with the protocols of the disarmament treaty, a move welcomed by Washington.

The protocols were signed by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov last September in a bid to satisfy Russian concerns about the treaty.

Indonesian riot police push back hundreds of students from the Jakarta Institute of Social and Political Science who were trying to leave their campus during an anti-government protest. Indonesian students held anti-government protests despite weekend talks with cabinet ministers aimed at ending demonstrations for political and economic reform (Reuters photo)

Indonesia students protest again, despite talks

JAKARTA (R) — Indonesian students held anti-government protests in two cities Monday despite weekend talks with cabinet ministers aimed at ending demonstrations for political and economic reform.

A prominent Muslim leader was quoted as saying the protests, most of which have demanded President Suharto step down to accept responsibility for a major economic crisis, were at the point of no return and government threats of force would not stop them.

Thousands of students held a protest rally at the Adhi Tama Institute of Technology in the east Java city of Surabaya and then marched to the nearby Putara Bangas university shouting "reform or war", witnesses said.

Although the military has said it will use force to ensure protests are restrained within campus boundaries, police watched but did not intervene, the witnesses said.

The students chanted slogans demanding those responsible for the crisis be brought before the people's constituent assembly. "Bring Suharto, bring Suharto," they shouted.

Students at Jakarta's Institute of Social and Political Science also held a brief protest, but dispersed peacefully when police blocked them from moving off campus, witnesses said.

The government announced a 117-point reform programme in agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) earlier this month and set April 22 as the deadline to implement several of them, including a bankruptcy law and a commercial court.

Indonesia has undertaken the reforms in return for a $40 billion IMF bail-out package in the worst economic crisis in Mr. Suharto's 32 years in power. The devastating crisis has led to unprecedented challenges to his rule.

Amien Rais, a fierce government critic and head of the 28-million-strong Muhammadiyah Muslim organisation, was quoted in the Jakarta Post newspaper as saying the students had reached a point of no return in their agitation.

"The government must face the reality that the country is in a dire condition and reforms are really needed," he said.

Last week, Mr. Suharto gave security forces the green light to use force if the students did not stop the demonstrations.

"The students are not afraid of such warnings," Mr. Rais said, adding a call for Indonesia's powerful military to support their demands for reform.

"The pressure should not cease although there has been appeasement from the government," he added.

He was referring to talks senior cabinet ministers held with student representatives Saturday, when the government listened with unusual good grace as speakers launched an all-out attack on the administration.

But students have said political reform is necessary along with economic reform, blaming the nation's woes on crony capitalism centred around Mr. Suharto.

Political analysts said the participants did not include students from universities at the forefront of the protests and that the demonstrations were likely to continue.

Lack of U.S. leadership in Americas could hurt hemisphere

SANTIAGO (AFP) — Despite all the rhetoric about building a regional united family of nations, the second Summit of the Americas, which concluded here Sunday, revealed a deep chasm between the United States and the rest of its hemispheric partners.

On issues ranging from trade and anti-drug strategy to policies on Cuba, the United States emerged as the odd man out in the two-day summit.

The leaders of 34 nations of the Americas, excluding Cuba, launched landmark negotiations to create the world's largest trading bloc.

However U.S. President Bill Clinton arrived without the "fast-track" authority needed to ensure U.S. approval of trade pacts without congressional amendments, which analysts say caused a loss of face for Washington on other hemispheric issues.

"Very little (of the initiatives agreed on here) will be implemented if the United States doesn't reestablish its leadership through delivering on what the hemisphere wants most, which is trade," said Robin Rosenberg, an analyst from the North-South Centre at the University of Florida at Miami.

"By complicating fast track for the administration (U.S. labour and environment groups) jeopardised U.S. leadership on issues that are most important to them," Mr. Rosenberg said.

Fearing that free trade could lead to U.S. jobs moving abroad, especially to Mexico, Mr. Clinton's own Democrats defeated "fast-track" legislation in Congress before it could go to a vote.

A weak Washington "can be seen as an equalling-out of hemispheric relations," Mr. Rosenberg added, "but the reality of inter-American affairs is that U.S. leadership is needed on a variety of fronts."

Much of the problem, according to Latin America analyst Eduardo Gamarra, is that the U.S. administration has "surrendered much of foreign policy (decisions) to Congress."

In addition to the "fast track" fiasco, the White House has to bow to Congress due to legislation requiring it to "decertify" countries it sees as not fully cooperating in the fight against drugs.

Latin American nations resent the annual unilateral evaluation. As a counterbalance, leaders here agreed to create a multilateral agency to oversee progress in drug-fighting efforts.

U.S. drug czar Barry McCaffrey, travelling with Mr. Clinton here, however warned that the certification policy "in the near term ... won't go away." "The U.S. Congress is not going to give up its cherished certification process," added Ambler Moss, a former U.S. ambassador to Latin America.

On Cuba, Washington has maintained its hard-line stance of sanctions and isolation, while a growing number of hemispheric nations are calling for engagement.

Barbados Prime Minister Owen Arthur said in his opening remarks at the summit that it should be the last Americas-wide meeting without the participation of Cuba.

During the summit, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien announced an upcoming visit to Cuba, and reiterated calls to include the island nation in the hemispheric meetings.

Mr. Chretien however said that "the consensus is not there today" to invite Cuba to the next summit, which he will host.

While the presidents of Chile and Brazil were firm in demanding democratic reform in Cuba before accepting its membership in the Americas club, they actively seek closer trade and diplomatic ties with Havana.

While Cuba was not officially on the agenda, the thorny issue was raised at a private meeting of the 34 presidents.

According to different reports, Mr. Clinton, though friendly, ignored their efforts to loosen U.S. policy towards Cuba. The issue was repeatedly raised by several countries, especially those in the Caribbean.

Presidents ranging from Peru's Alberto Fujimori to Paraguay's Juan Carlos Wasmosy criticised Cuba's absence at the meeting.

Indian crisis deepens as tainted ministers refuse to quit

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A crisis in India's new coalition government deepened Monday, with three cabinet ministers rejecting an "ultimatum" from a key member of the alliance to quit over corruption allegations.

Urban Development Minister Ram Jethmalani, Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde and Communications Minister Buta Singh hit back by saying Jayalalitha Jayaram, who has demanded their removal, should be told to leave the minority alliance.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was Monday trying to placate the maverick Jayalalitha and head off the crisis threatening his month-old government.

Ms. Jayaram said in a statement that Mr. Vajpayee had spoken to her for a "long time" on various issues and had said he would give "serious thought" to her demand and take "appropriate action."

The simmering affair began a fortnight ago when one of Ms. Jayaram's protégés was forced to quit the cabinet over corruption charges.

Ms. Jayaram, a leader from southern India whose support is vital for the multi-party coalition, immediately called on all ministers facing similar charges to go. She also accused Mr. Vajpayee of double standards.

Mr. Jethmalani was quoted as saying Monday: "The prime minister should not hesitate in telling Jayalalitha that enough is enough. If she wants, she can leave the government."

"Self-respect is above all else. If this continues, we can easily sit in the opposition," he told the Statesman newspaper.

Ms. Jayaram's AIADMK party and its allies from the state of Tamil Nadu command 27 of the Hindu nationalist-led coalition's 264 seats. The alliance is just short of a majority in the 545-seat lower house.

Mr. Vajpayee, sworn in last month after national elections, subsequently scraped through a confidence motion on outside support.

India has had five governments and two elections since early 1996.

The Press Trust of India said Ms. Jayaram's demands amounted to "an ultimatum" that could lead to her quitting the coalition.

The Hindustan Times said Mr. Vajpayee had written her a letter to try to break the impasse.

Commerce Minister Hegde said the actress-turned-politician was "behaving like a teenager," while Mr. Singh branded the allegations "political blackmail."

Ms. Jayaram's salvo came after Mr. Vajpayee asked Surface Transport Minister S.R. Muthiah, a member of the AIADMK, to step down over corruption charges. Mr. Muthiah resigned on April 8.

Ms. Jayaram, herself facing six corruption cases in Tamil Nadu and currently on bail but who holds no position within the government, said it was "strange and unfortunate" that Mr. Vajpayee had failed to adopt "the same set of principles" with all ministers.

The prime minister's coalition is made up of a dozen parties, many of them — including the AIADMK — regional groups that do not share many of the core beliefs of Mr. Vajpayee's Hindu nationalists and lack a national agenda.

Ms. Jayaram almost pulled the rug from the coalition before it was sworn in. She claimed Mr. Vajpayee was not taking demands for Tamil Nadu seriously.

Media reports said the rift, papered over at the last minute, followed Ms. Jayaram's unsuccessful demand for the influential finance portfolio.

The AIADMK leader, often compared with former Philippines first lady Imelda Marcos for her extravagant lifestyle, is also demanding New Delhi dismiss the Tamil Nadu state government for alleged misrule.

Ms. Jayaram, chief minister of the coastal state between 1991-96 but whose party is now in opposition, wants new elections in the hope of returning to power.

Irish government considers peace vote crux

DUBLIN (AFP) — The Irish government met Monday to map out its campaign in support of the Northern Ireland peace agreement and to decide whether to postpone a vote on the EU Amsterdam Treaty which is also planned to be held simultaneously with the settlement referendum on May 22.

Prime Minister Bertie Ahern is understood to be in favour of holding both votes on the same day to save the cost of a separate vote and ensure a high turnout for the Amsterdam Treaty. The two main opposition parties also favour holding both votes on the same day but Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, and the small Democratic Left and Green parties want them separated.

All normal business will be put aside Tuesday when the Dail — the lower house of parliament — returns from its Easter holiday. An 11-hour debate on the peace deal will be held over two days.

The six leaders of the main political parties in the Republic have signed a parliamentary motion welcoming and approving the peace deal.

The Seanad — the upper house — will debate the deal Wednesday.

Both houses have to pass legislation for the May 22 referendum by midnight Wednesday to give the required 30 days notice of the vote.

The Treaty of Amsterdam, adopted last year, replaces the Maastricht Treaty and aims to reform the European Union, opening the road for EU enlargement.

Kohl's situation continues to worsen in German campaign

BONN (AFP) — Even the right-wing press is doubting conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl's chances for reelection in the September national ballot.

Sunday, the right-wing Bild am Sonntag newspaper asked in its front-page headline: "Who can still stop Schroeder" and said about Mr. Kohl: "Never have the chances of Chancellor Helmut Kohl ahead of a national election seemed so hopeless."

And the Bild Monday reported ironically about Mr. Kohl returning to work after a two-week Easter vacation and cure — having lost 15 pounds — "As a practising Catholic Kohl knows faith can move mountains."

With less than a week to go before a key state election, Mr. Kohl and his Christian Democratic Union (CDU) look increasingly helpless before the media and vote-getting machine of opposition candidate Gerhard Schroeder, a market-friendly leftist calling for a "New Centre" to unite the political spectrum.

Mr. Kohl, 68, in power for 16 years, has a hard time convincing voters that he can turn around an economic situation in which Germany has record post-war unemployment of almost 12 per cent.

Mr. Kohl says the solution is reforming a tax system that makes it costly for businesses to hire workers. But this is just what Mr. Schroeder proposes, with his promise that a new government can do it better.

Mr. Kohl also has been embarrassed by a series of rifts within his ruling coalition, the most recent coming this weekend when his liberal allies, the Free Democrats (FDP) called at a party congress for radical tax reforms far beyond what the coalition wants.

The FDP even called for doing away entirely with the solidarity tax used to finance development in eastern Germany, a proposal that should do little to help its chances in state elections Sunday in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt.

Mr. Schroeder has widened his lead over Mr. Kohl to 40 percentage points, according to a poll released last week.

Sixty-six per cent of Germans said they plan to vote for Mr. Schroeder, who was officially nominated Friday by the Social Democratic Party as their challenger to Mr. Kohl, the monthly poll by ZDF state television said.

Mr. Kohl would be left with a mere 26 per cent of the vote.

It is the biggest lead notched up by Mr. Schroeder, 54, in a poll on the elections due on Sept. 27.

Mr. Kohl was also far behind four years ago when he rallied to win the 1994 parliamentary ballot. But Defence Minister Volker Ruehe said over the weekend that it would be "naive" to think that at this point "the trend is turning for us."

Meanwhile, polls over the weekend ahead of the vote for the Saxony-Anhalt parliament showed the CDU looking ever more anaemic against the SPD.

A FORSA institute poll showed the SPD with 41 per cent to 24 per cent for the CDU while another poll, by INFAS, had the SPD with 44 per cent and the CDU with 25 per cent.

State elections have become almost primaries ahead of the September vote. It was in his state ballot, in Lower Saxony March 1, that Mr. Schroeder nailed down his SPD nomination to run as chancellor with a landslide victory for reelection as governor.

Pro-democracy activists chant slogans as they march to Hong Kong's Xinhua News Agency, the de facto embassy in the former British territory. Protesters demanded Chinese government release more jailed Chinese dissidents (Reuters photo)

Dissidents hope Clinton's visit will open the prison gates

BEIJING (AFP) — The release of top political prisoner Wang Dan fanned new hopes Monday among Chinese dissidents' families that the visit to China by U.S. President Bill Clinton in June could work miracles.

But many believe it will be hard to attract the same kind of international attention enjoyed by Mr. Wang and Wei Jingsheng for less well-known political detainees.

Mr. Wang was released Sunday and sent to exile in the United States just weeks ahead of a summit here, in a move which some analysts said showed there had been some kind of deal.

"Everything depends now on President Clinton," said Chu Hailan, the wife of Liu Nianchun, who is serving a three-year jail term for calling for trade union freedom.

According to some sources, Mr. Liu, 48, may be the next to be released before the end of his sentence.

"I have already called for a medical parole, as my husband is suffering from a intestinal tumour, ulcers and digestive problems," Mrs. Chu said. "He is due to be freed in May 1999 and I hope that he will be at least cared for properly."

Mr. Liu is not prepared to leave China in exchange for an early release, she said. "But if the government wants him to go into exile, then he will have no choice.

Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan also doggedly refused for a long time to accept to move abroad in exchange for release, but finally bowed under intense pressure from the authorities.

The sister of Chen Longde, another who may win an early parole, has no illusions about how the Chinese justice system works.

"I have called for a medical parole, but there is no point as my brother is not as well known as Wang Dan," Chen Xiaoying said by telephone from the eastern city of Hangzhou.

Chen Longde, 40, was sentenced to three years in a labour camp after calling for the release of prisoners of conscience. Persecuted by a guard, he threw himself from a second floor and broke a leg.

"He still cannot walk and has problems with his trachea," Mrs. Chen said.

Her brother is due to be released in June 1999 and Mrs. Chen believes that he would be prepared to go into exile.

"He has nothing in China, no work, no money. What is the point staying," she said. "Clinton in our last hope."

Literary critic Liu Xiaobo, 42, is the third dissident who could be given a parole. He was jailed for three years hard labour in October 1996 for calling for an open dialogue with the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

"We haven't called for a medical parole, because he is not unwell, but simply for his release and I hope that Clinton can help us," his wife Liu Xia said.

Two other political prisoners, who are also sick and serving heavy sentences for "divulging state secrets" could also be pardoned — journalist Gao Yu, 54, philosophy researcher Li Hai, 44.

However their cases have been complicated by the fact that they still refuse to confess "their crimes". "My mother is very sick and our call for a medical parole will not be taken into consideration unless she confesses to crimes she did not commit," said Gao Yu's son Zhao Meng. The journalist has been suffering from heart problems, rheumatism and allergies. She is serving a six-year term imposed in October 1993 for publishing economic statistics in the Hong Kong press.

"She is ready to go into exile if she is given the chance, and we hope that her case will be put forward by President Clinton", he said.

The health of Li Hai, sentenced in December 1996 to nine years in prison for revealing state secrets, is very worrying, his mother said.

"He is suffering from gallstones, hypertension, and serious liver problems," Gong Liwen said by telephone.

"If he has to go into exile to be free and cured, then that is better than staying a prisoner here. I hope that he will be the third on the list of presents from China to Clinton."

N. Korea blames South for breakdown of talks in Beijing

SEOUL (AFP) — North Korea Monday blamed South Korea for the breakdown of high-level talks in Beijing last week in which Pyongyang had hoped to reach an agreement with Seoul on the provision of fertilisers.

"The talks, which began after the South Korean authorities officially suggested supply of fertilisers were deadlocked without scoring any success due to the South side's unreasonable position and wrong behaviour," the spokesman for the secretariat of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland said in a statement.

The statement was carried by the North Korea's Central News Agency (KCNA), monitored here in Seoul.

"Through the talks, the South side revealed that the present regime is little different from the (former president) Kim Young-Sam regime in seeking confrontation with the North," it said.

"The South Korean authorities should be held wholly responsible for the deadlocked talks and the gloomy prospect of inter-Korean relations," it said.

The Beijing talks — the first official inter-government contact in four years — collapsed after North Korea refused to accept South Korea's demand that it open a new round of Red Cross talks to discuss ways of helping reunite separated families in return for fertilisers.

North Korea said they would discuss the issue when Red Cross officials from the two Koreas meet, possibly next month, to discuss the next shipment of private food donations to the North.

But South Korea demanded a separate meeting be held to arrange reunions of families torn apart by the division of Korea in 1945.

Yeltsin guarantees Kurils to stay part of Russia

MOSCOW (AFP) — The Kremlin stressed Monday that despite friendly gestures between President Boris Yeltsin and Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto at their weekend talks, Russia would not cede its territorial integrity over the Kuril Islands, Interfax reported.

The news agency cited Mr. Yeltsin's spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky as saying that the head of state would guarantee the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, for all the talk of rapprochement over the disputed Kuril Islands at the summit in Kawana, Japan.

"The Russian Constitution says in no uncertain terms that the country's territorial integrity is inviolable and the president guarantees this," said President Boris Yeltsin's spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky.

The Kuril dispute has blocked the signing of a peace treaty between Russia and Japan, and both leaders called at their informal summit for a solution to the row over the four small islands, which were taken by Soviet forces in the last days of World War II but have been claimed by Tokyo ever since.

Mr. Yeltsin, who gave his informal talks with Mr. Hashimoto "eight out of 10" according to Mr. Yastrzhembsky, called for major joint projects on the disputed islands, including a fisheries plant, port infrastructure and an airport.

Mr. Hashimoto meanwhile said Japan was considering supplying diesel-powered generators to residents on the four islands because of the electricity shortages there.

Mr. Yastrzhembsky was speaking to journalists in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk on the far eastern island of Sakhalin, where he and a team of Kremlin officials headed to assess regional issues in the wake of Mr. Yeltsin's weekend talks with Mr. Hashimoto.

The unit will "look at what is going on in the region in the light of the Russian-Japanese relations which have been expanding at a high rate recently," Mr. Yastrzhembsky said, adding that officials could travel on to the adjacent Kuril Islands themselves for further fact-finding.

"Nobody is going to do anything behind the back of Sakhaliners and Russians," Mr. Yastrzhembsky said. "Misgivings about that are absolutely groundless."

The team will report its findings to Mr. Yeltsin, Mr. Yastrzhembsky said.

Suspected militants gun down 29 in Kashmir

JAMMU, India (R) — Suspected separatist guerrillas shot dead 29 people in an attack on a Kashmiri village, Indian security officials said Monday.

The dead, mostly Hindus, included 12 children, a Border Security Force (BSF) official told Reuters in Jammu.

No group has claimed responsibility for the Friday night attack at Dhakikot, about 185 km from Jammu, winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir, mainly Hindu India's only Muslim majority state.

Authorities had earlier put the toll at 13.

The killings shattered a fragile peace that authorities had said had returned to the Himalayan province after years of bloody separatist rebellion.

"All four Hindu families in the village had been gunned down and their houses set ablaze in the midnight operation," the BSF official said. Reports on the shootings were delayed because of the remoteness of the area.

The BSF official said the killings took place at a time when 15 guerrillas were holed up in a cave for three days in a nearby village after an encounter with security forces.

"The colleagues of this group had resorted to killing these innocent people in retaliation for our action and to break our cordon," the official said.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah asked the federal government to provide additional troops to plug the porous border with Pakistan.

Mr. Abdullah blamed Pakistan, which routinely denies frequent Indian charges of fomenting militancy in the state, of triggering the killings.

India controls two thirds of the disputed region while Pakistan controls the rest.

"The gruesome killing of the innocent people will continue here until the borders are not completely sealed off," Mr. Abdullah told reporters after visiting Dhakikot.

More than 25,000 people have been killed in Jammu and Kashmir since the rebellion started in 1990.

Work officially begins at Bosnia massacre site

SARAJEVO (AFP) — Forensic experts from the U.N. war crimes tribunal Monday officially began exhuming a site in northeast Bosnia thought to contain victims of the Srebrenica massacre, a U.N. official said.

The site, next to a power dam near Zvornik, 35 kilometres from Srebrenica, is one of several that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) plans to dig up this year.

Last week preliminary work turned up strong evidence that many people had been killed at the site, although it was not clear if all the remains had been buried there, a U.N. spokesman said last Thursday.

Mechanical diggers have been brought in to the site, following a sweep of the area for land mines.

Results of the exhumation will be used by the ICTY as evidence in the trials of those indicted for the July 1995 slaughter of thousands of Muslim males when Serb forces overran Srebrenica, which was a UN-declared "safe area."

The accused include the Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic and his army commander, General Ratko Mladic, both of whom remain at large.

S. Africa has no knowledge of tainted blood exports

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South Africa expressed concern Monday about reports from Austria alleging that HIV- and hepatitis-tainted blood plasma was exported from this country.

"With the stringent controls in place, contaminated blood plasma cannot legally be exported from South Africa," the foreign ministry said.

News reports in Austria recently identified an Austrian firm which exported tainted blood plasma to hospitals in India and Asia after buying it cheaply in Africa.

Austria's health ministry said the firm went out of business after the scandal was discovered in December 1996, but that it may have been making illegal exports for some years.

South Africa's foreign ministry said that all seven of the country's blood transfusion services "have indicated that they have no knowledge of the alleged contaminated blood plasma purportedly exported from South Africa."

The country's health regulations require that all blood donations be tested for infectious agents including HIV and hepatitis, the ministry said.

The Austrian company was reported to have imported blood on the cheap from Africa, officially for laboratories to carry out research on the HIV virus which causes AIDS.

The blood, or derivative products, were then relabelled in a scam to be reexported to Asian countries at a profit.

It went out of business in early 1997. Several of its managers are being questioned over the affair.

Free speech saves Finn priests accused of heresy

HELSINKI (R) — Finland's dominant Lutheran church is facing what looks like an epidemic of heresy in its ranks after one of its priests denied the existence of hell and another claimed Jesus was married.

Some Finns have been outraged as much by the claims as by the church's refusal to punish the offenders, apparently on the grounds that it would infringe on their right to free speech.

"Priests also have the right of free speech and personal opinions," Helsinki Bishop Eero Huovinen said in a statement.

Last week, the church reprimanded but stopped short of firing minister Olli Arola, who said that Jesus might have been married to Mary Magdalene and cast doubt over the immaculate conception — a key tenet of Christian faith.

The row came as the church was already struggling to defend its integrity over a recent book by Helsinki priest Antti Kylliainen, in which he said hell did not exist and that everybody would get into heaven.

Thousands of Finns sent protest letters to the church, saying Antti Kylliainen's book amounted to heresy. But after an official inquiry into the heresy allegations, the Helsinki diocese decided not to punish the minister.

Infuriated protesters appealed the decision to the parliamentary ombudsman and the supreme administrative court.

Mexican Nobel laureate, Octavio Paz, dead at 84

MEXICO CITY (AFP) — Mexico's greatest poet and philosopher, the 1990 literature Nobel prize winner Octavio Paz, has died after dominating Mexican letters for nearly a half century. He was 84.

Paz died at 8:35 p.m. Sunday (0035 GMT Monday), according to the television network Televisa.

"Mexico has lost its greatest thinker and poet," President Ernesto Zedillo said, commenting on Paz's death. "This is an irreparable loss."

The writer had open heart surgery in 1994 and reportedly underwent chemotherapy at the Military Hospital for prostate cancer in 1997.

Paz was best known in the English-speaking world for his 1950 book-length essay "The Labyrinth of Solitude," an explanation of Mexico's national character.

The book is based on a metaphor that Mexico is the offspring of a Spanish conqueror and an Indian woman who was sold into slavery by her people. In turn, the woman betrays those who enslaved her.

Paz was a cosmopolitan writer who was influenced by Japan and the United States as well as his homeland. In his work he was versatile enough to use such disparate themes as symbolism from Mexico's Nahuatl mythology, as well as existentialism from German philosopher Martin Heidegger.

His best known book of poetry is "Libertad bajo palabra," or "Released on his own recognisance."

Octavio Paz, one of Mexico's greatest poets and writers who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1990, died April 19 at age of 84, official news agency Notimex said early April 20. Paz, shown in this file photo, had been seriously ill with cancer and was seldom seen in public before his death, but he continued to edit the literary magazine he founded, called 'Vuelta' (Reuters photo)

Paz was born on March 31, 1914, on the outskirts of Mexico City. His father was a journalist who followed revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata into battle, and his mother was the staunchly Catholic daughter of immigrants from Spain.

Paz's grew up among the comfortable white "Creole" class. However his family was so impoverished during the following Mexican revolution — an upheaval that began in 1910 and dragged into the 1920s — that at one point the family mansion was literally falling down around him.

"As rooms collapsed," Paz said in a 1973 interview, "we moved the furniture into others."

Schooled by Roman Catholic Marist brothers, Paz read widely from his paternal grandfather's huge library. His father's sister, Amalia, introduced him to such writers as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Victor Hugo, where he learned about French political thought.

The budding author published his first book of poetry — "Luna Silvestre" or "Forest Moon" — at the tender age of 19.

The most decisive year for Paz was 1937. In that year the author travelled to Spain, where he witnessed the defeat of the Republican government by the fascist forces of General Francisco Franco. During that same trip to Europe he met poets Robert Desnos, Cesar Vallejo, Vicente Huidobro and Pablo Neruda. He also met, and eventually married, the Mexican writer Elena Garro, with whom he had one daughter.

In 1944 Paz won a Guggenheim fellowship and travelled to the United States, where he read English-language poets such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and E.E. Cummings.

Facing financial problems, Paz joined the Mexican diplomatic service in 1945. He was named ambassador to India in 1962, and met his second wife Marie Jose Tramini, who remained his love until his dying day.

Paz however resigned from government service in disgust over the massacre of protesting students in Mexico City in 1968.

Politically, the conservative Paz was an energetic foe of leftist movements in Mexico and around the world, but he was also a defender of democracy who highlighted the cruel face of undiluted capitalism.

Top official in Moscow to prepare Clinton-Yeltsin G8 meet

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his U.S. connterpart Bill Clinton will likely discuss disarmament issues on the sidelines of next month's G8 summit in an effort to clear the way for a Clinton visit to Moscow later in the year, U.S. officials said Monday.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, in charge of relations with former Soviet repnblics, is currently in Moscow preparing the agenda for the bilateral meeting during the May 16-17 summit of leading industrial nations.

"He's been preparing for Clinton and Yeltsin to meet on the sidelines of tbe G8 in Birmingham (England) next month," the official said.

"The White House is continuing to say that tbey would prefer the START II (treaty on nuclear disarmament) to be ratified before a Clinton visit" so that the two men could take disarmament talks furtber, the official said.

The situation "is still the same," he added.

Mr. Talbott later beld talks with interim Russian Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko during which the Birmingham encounter and bilateral cooperation were discussed, Interfax reported.

Mr. Kiriyenko said despite the change in government "our commitment to continued reform remains unchanged," Interfax reported, and pledged to honour existing bilateral agreements with Washington.

Mr. Clinton insisted March 13 that Russia's lower house of parliament, the state Duma, ratify the START II treaty before he would consider attending a summit with Mr. Yeltsin in Moscow this year.

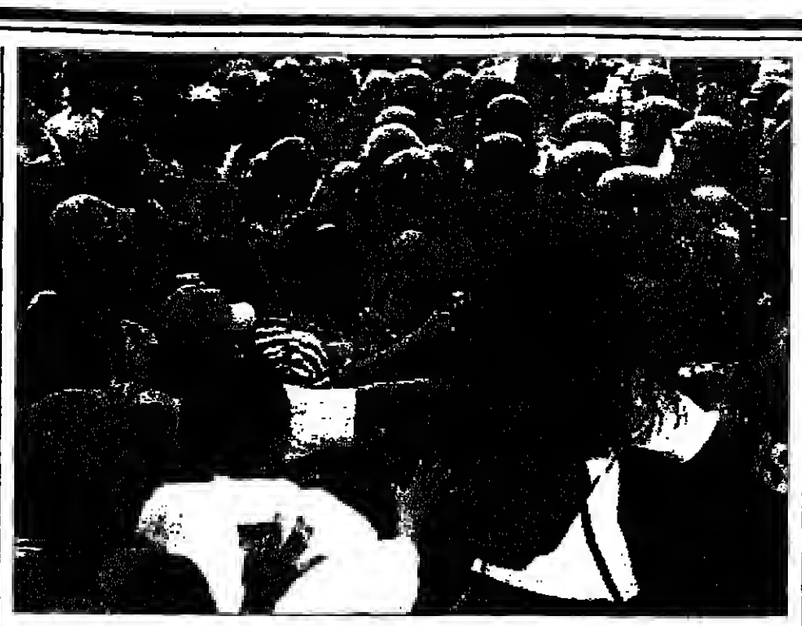
"It would occur after the Russian Duma ratified START II so that we could begin to work on START III and really ... take the next big step in lowering the nuclear weapons arsenals of both countries," he said.

START II, which provides for a two-thirds reduction in nuclear arsenals, was ratified by the U.S. Senate in January 1996 but has been blocked by Communist and nationalist deputies in Russia wbo say the accord puts Moscow at a disadvantage.

The treaty would leave Russia with 3,000 warheads by 2003, while the U.S. would be allowed to keep 3,500 nuclear warheads.

A week ago Mr. Yeltsin took ratification a step closer, presenting deputies with the protocols of the disarmament treaty, a move welcomed by Wasbington.

The protocols were signed by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Rnssian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov last September in a bid to satisfy Russian concerns about the treaty.



Indnnesian riot police push back hundreds nf students from the Jakarta Institute of Social and Political Science who were trying tn leave their campus during an anti-government protest. Indonesian students held anti-government protests despite weekend talks with cabinet ministers aimed at ending demnnstrations fnr pnlitical and economic reform (Reuters photo)

Indonesia students protest again, despite talks

JAKARTA (R) — Indonesian students held anti-government protests in two cities Monday despite weekend talks with cabinet ministers aimed at ending demonstrations for political and economic reform.

A prominent Muslim leader was quoted as saying the protests, most of which have demanded President Suharto step down to accept responsibility for a major economic crisis, were at the point of no return and government threats of force would not stop them.

Thousands of students beld a protest rally at the Adhi Tama Institute of Technology in the east Java city of Surabaya and then marched to the nearby Putara Bangas university shouting "reform or war", witnesses said.

Although the military has said it will use force to ensure protests are restrained within campus boundaries, police watcbed but did not intervene, the wimesses said.

The students chanted slogans demanding those responsible for the crisis be brought before the people's constituent assembly. "Bring Suharto, bring Suharto," they shouted.

Students at Jakarta's Insntute of Social and Political Science also held a brief protest, but dispersed peacefully when police blocked them from moving off campus, witnesses said.

The government announced a 117-point reform programme in agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) earlier this month and set April 22 as the deadline to implement several of them, including a bankruptcy law and a commercial court.

Indonesia has undertaken the reforms in return for a $40 billion IMF bail-out package in the worst economic crisis in Mr. Suharto's 32 years in power. The devastating crisis has led to unprecedented challenges to bis rule.

Amien Rais, a fierce government critic and head of the 28-million-strong Muhammadiyah Muslim organisation, was quoted in the Jakarta Post newspaper as saying the students had reached a point of no return in their agitation.

"The government must face the reality that the country is in a dire condition and reforms are really needed," he said.

Last week, Mr. Suharto gave security forces the green light to use force if the students did not stop the demonstrations.

"The students are not afraid of such warnings," Mr. Rais said, adding a call for Indonesia's powerful military to support their demands for reform.

"The pressure should not cease although there has been appeasement from the government," he added.

He was referring to talks senior cabinet ministers held with student representatives Saturday, when the government listened with unusual good grace as speakers launched an all-out attack on the administration.

But students have said political reform is necessary along with economic reform, blaming the nation's woes on crony capitalism centred around Mr. Suharto.

Political analysts said the participants did not include students from universities at the forefront of the protests and that the demonstrations were likely to continue.

Lack of U.S. leadership in Americas could hurt hemisphere

SANTIAGO (AFP) — Despite all the rhetoric about building a regional united family of nations, the second Summit of the Americas, whicb concluded here Sunday, revealed a deep chasm between the United States and the resi of its hemispheric partners.

On issues ranging from trade and anti-drug strategy to policies on Cuba, the United States emerged as the odd man out in the two-day summit.

The leaders of 34 nations of the Americas, excluding Cuha, launched landmark negotiations to create the world's largest trading bloc.

However U.S. President Bill Clinton arrived without the "fast-track" authority needed to ensure U.S. approval of trade pacts without congressional amendments, which analysts say caused a loss of face for Washington on other hemispheric issues.

"Very little (of the initiatives agreed on here) will be implemented if the United States doesn't reestablish its leadership through delivering on wbat the bemispbere wants most, whicb is trade," said Robin Rosenberg, an analyst from the North-South Centre at the University of Florida at Miami.

"By complicating fast track for the administration (U.S. labour and environment groups) jeopardised U.S. leadership on issues that are most important to them," Mr. Rosenberg said.

Fearing that free trade could lead to U.S. jobs moving abroad, especially to Mexico, Mr. Clinton's own Democrats defeated "fast-track" legislation in Congress before it could go to a vote.

A weak Washington "can he seen as an equalling-out of hemispheric relations," Mr. Rosenberg added, "hut the reality of inter-American affairs is that U.S. leadersbip is needed on a variety of fronts."

Much of the problem, according to Latin America analyst Eduardo Gamarra, is that the U.S. administration has "surrendered much of foreign policy (decisions) to Congress."

In addition to the "fast track" fiasco, the White House has to bow to Congress due to legislation requiring it to "decertify" countries it sees as not fully cooperating in the fight against drugs.

Latin American nations resent the annual tnilateral evaluation. As a counterbalance, leaders bere agreed to create a mnltilateral agency to oversee progress in drug-fighting efforts.

U.S. drug czar Barry McCaffrey, travelling with Mr. Clinton here, bowever warned that the certification policy "in the near term ... won't go away." "The U.S. Congress is not going to give tp its cberished certification process," added Ambler Moss, a former U.S. ambassador to Latin America.

On Cuba, Wasbington has maintained its hardline stance of sanctions and isolation, while a growing number of hemispheric nations are calling for engagement.

Barbados Prime Minister Owen Arthur said in his opening remarks at the summit that it should be the last Americas-wide meeting without the participation of Cuba.

During the summit, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien announced an upcoming visit to Cuba, and reiterated calls to include the island nation in the hemispheric meetings.

Mr. Chretien however said that "the consensus is not there today" to invite Cuha to the next summit, which he will host.

While the presidents of Chile and Brazil were firm in demanding democratic reform in Cuba before accepting its membership in the Americas club, they actively seek closer trade and diplomatic ties with Havana.

While Cuba was not officially on the agenda, the thorny issue was raised at a private meeting of the 34 presidents.

According to different reports, Mr. Clinton, though friendly, ignored their efforts to loosen U.S. policy towards Cuba. The issue was repeatedly raised by several countries, especially those in the Caribbean.

Presidents ranging from Peru's Alberto Fujimori to Paraguay's Juan Carlos Wasmosy criticised Cuba's absence at the meeting.

Indian crisis deepens as tainted ministers refuse to quit

NEW DELHI (AFP) — [illegible] crisis in India's new coalition government deepened Monday, with three cabinet ministers rejecting an "ultimatum" from a key member of the alliance to quit over corruption allegations.

Urban Development Minister Ram Jethmalani, Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde and Communications Minister Buta Singb hit back by saying Jayalalitha Jayaram, who has demanded their removal, should be told to leave the minority alliance.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was Monday trying to placate the maverick Jayalalitha and head off the crisis threatening his month-old government.

Ms. Jayaram said in a statement that Mr. Vajpayee had spoken to her for a "long time" on various issues and had said he would give "serious thought" to her demand and take "appropriate action."

The simmering affair began a fortnight ago when one of Ms. Jayaram's protégés was forced to quit the cabinet over corruption [illegible] since early 1996.

[illegible] Press Trust of India [illegible] Ms. Jayaram's [illegible] amounted to "an [illegible]" that could lead [illegible] ting the coalition. [illegible] Hindustan Times [illegible] Vajpayee had written [illegible] a letter to try to break the impasse.

Commerce Minister Hegde said the actress-turned-politician was "behaving like a teenager," while Mr. Singh branded the allegations "political blackmail."

Ms. Jayaram's salvo came after Mr. Vajpayee asked Surface Transport Minister S.R. Muthiah, a member of the AIADMK, to step down over corruption charges. Mr. Muthiah resigned on April 8.

Ms. Jayaram, herself facing six corruption cases in Tamil Nadu and currently on bail but who holds no position within the government, said it was "strange and unfortunate" that Mr. Vajpayee bad failed to adopt "the same set of principles" with all ministers.

The prime minister's coalition is made up of a dozen parties, many of them — including the AIADMK — regional groups that do not share many of the core beliefs of Mr. Vajpayee's Hindu nationalists and lack a national agenda.

Ms. Jayaram almost pulled the rug from the coalition before it was sworn in. She claimed Mr. Vajpayee was not taking demands for Tamil Nadu seriously.

Media reports said the rift, papered over at the last minute, followed Ms. Jayaram's unsuccessful demand for the influential finance portfolio.

The AIADMK leader, often compared with former Philippines first lady Imelda Marcos for her extravagant lifestyle, is also demanding New Delhi dismiss the Tamil Nadu state government for alleged misrule.

Ms. Jayaram, chief minister of the coastal state between 1991-96 but whose party is now in opposition, wants new elections in the hope of returning to power.

Irish government considers peace vote crux

DUBLIN (AFP) — The Irish government met Monday to map out its campaign in support of the Northern Ireland peace agreement and to decide wbether to postpone a vote on the EU Amsterdam Treaty which is also planned to be beld simultaneously with the settlement referendum on May 22.

Prime Minister Bertie Ahern is understood to be in favour of holding both votes on the same day to save the cost of a separate vote and ensure a high turnout for the Amsterdam Treaty. The two main opposition parties also favour holding both votes on the same day but Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, and the small Democratic Left and Green parties want them separated.

All normal business will be put aside Tuesday when the Dail — the lower house of parliament — returns from its Easter holiday. An 11-bour debate on the peace deal will be held over two days.

The six leaders of the main political parties in the Republic have signed a parliamentary motion welcoming and approving the peace deal.

The Seanad — the upper house — will debate the deal Wednesday.

Both houses have to pass legislation for the May 22 referendum by midnight Wednesday to give the required 30 days notice of the vote.

The Treaty of Amsterdam, adopted last year, replaces the Maastricht Treaty and aims to reform the European Union, opening the road for EU enlargement.

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Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
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Peace tactics need revision

BY BANKING on the spirit of the historic Irish agreement, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has apparently been hoping to succeed where other leaders have failed in convincing the Israeli and Palestinian sides to try again. Mr. Blair also has a dual capacity in which he could lend support to the effort to revive the stalled peace process in the Middle East: Not only is he the current president of the European Union (EU) but he also enjoys the backing of U.S. President Bill Clinton.

It is hard to tell whether the much-talked about American proposal for moving forward the Palestinian-Israeli track will be repackaged to soothe the nerves of Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu or simply remain the same. Signals from Israel seem to suggest that Netanyahu may have to listen more than ever before to the urgent calls for a fresh and determined start in the peace process. He has said that in the wake of his talks with his British counterpart, he is "prepared to go anywhere, any time, and specifically in the next month, to any location and possibly to London, to try and advance the process."

Of course this pious declaration in itself would mean very little unless it is coupled with assurances that Israel now means business and is not just making rhetorical pronouncements. We know already the U.S. thoughts on the subject. Washington has called for an Israeli military withdrawal of up to 13 per cent from the Palestinian territories over a period of three months. The fact that the U.S. never went public with its ideas for fear of antagonising Israel is understandable. If London could convince Israel to deliver more than it has already offered the Palestinians, then that would ensure Britain, and by extension the EU, a more appropriate place in peace-making in the region. Mr. Blair is not the first and certainly not the last world leader to try his hand at the peace process.

Dozens of world leaders before him tried and failed. As recently as last weekend, His Majesty King Hussein once more tried to impress on the Israeli leader the dangers inherent in his delaying tactics, not only to Palestinians and Jordanians but likewise to the Israeli people. What is really needed at this juncture is coherent and meaningful pressure on Netanyahu to relent to the dictates of peace-making.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Aswaq's Rashid Hassan Monday urged Britain to shoulder its responsibility towards world issues at the international and the European levels and to support efforts aimed at solving the refugee problem. The writer said Britain has a serious responsibility towards solving the Palestine question and settling the refugee issue because it was Britain which helped create the Zionist entity in Palestine in the first place when it had a mandate to rule Palestine and because Britain has more interests in the Arab World than in Israel. The writer said that through its prominent status within the European Union, Britain should be contributing towards an end to the plight of the refugees not by sending relief supplies to the camps but rather through backing efforts towards their return to their homeland and receiving compensation for their lost property. Referring to the British prime minister's visit to the refugee camps in Jordan the writer expressed hope that the visit would help the British government realise the real sufferings of the displaced Palestinians and work towards serving them justice.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Saleh Qallah said he believes a new crisis between the U.S. and Iraq is emerging soon and warned that the region could sooner rather than later face danger once again. The Iraqis most recently manifested their military strength in a parade in Baghdad in reaction to a tour of the region by U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen and the open threats he made against Baghdad, noted the writer. Furthermore the chief arms inspector, Richard Butler, has been issuing statements claiming that Iraq is still concealing weapons of mass destruction, thus paving the ground for a new crisis which will develop between Baghdad and the U.N., leading to a crisis between Washington and Baghdad, noted the writer. He said U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has done what he can to avert a military strike and defuse the arms inspection crisis, but it seems that Annan's efforts did not satisfy the Americans and their allies. The writer said perhaps Annan would have to make a series of visits to the region if he is concerned about averting further conflicts.

The View from Fourth Circle

By Rami G. Khouri

Historical jubilees ask us to remember

THE DOCUMENT issued by the Vatican on March 12 about the Catholic Church's relations with the Jewish people and the church's actions during the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews — entitled We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah — is complex, nuanced, constructive, and timely. It deserves much more cool analysis and reflection than it has received by all concerned, notably by Arabs, Israelis, Christians, Muslims and Jews. I have taken the time to read the document carefully, and to discuss it with Christian, Jewish and Muslim friends in both Amman and Jerusalem. I sense that the Vatican has not only contributed a valuable and appropriate theological perspective on the ugly political events of the recent past; it has also provided constructive moral and political guidelines that we can use to address and resolve our conflict, in the present and the future.

Several points strike me as very important about this document. First, it was directed to "our brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church throughout the world," and not only to the Jewish people, and not at all formally to the State of Israel. There is good reason for not addressing the document to the State of Israel (in my view, not the Vatican's), because Israel did not exist when the Holocaust occurred, it is not necessarily accepted by all Jews as their sole and official representative, and some of Israel's own policies and practices today are deeply problematic in legal, political and moral terms. Whether or not Israel had been created, the Vatican still would have been right to issue this statement, and to "ask our Jewish friends...to hear us with open hearts."

Second, it is only the latest in a long series of statements, dialogues, and theological-political dynamics that have taken place between Christians and Jews, since the birth of Christianity as something of a Galileean reform movement in the 1st Century AD. Christian-Jewish history has always been and remains a messy business, but it is slowly sorting out its true criminality from its more manageable human manifestations of anger, fear, arrogance, distress and revenge.

Third, it is a rather universal and not a very particular document — a timeless statement about appropriate or unacceptable human behaviour by all peoples, at all times, in all places. It is at once a statement about how Christians and all other human beings should relate to Jews, and how Jews should relate to all others in this world. The explicit moral call for responsibility, remorse, and repentance that the Vatican makes in this document is offered expansively, in the universalistic spirit of the Catholic Church, Christianity, and the shared Judaeo-Christian-Muslim Abrahamic tradition. It is triggered specifically by the church's need to respond to the particularly horrific crime of the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews, but it is not only about this one evil matter.

Fourth, the document is offered within the context of Jubilee — the Old Testament celebration of a joyous event, usually every 50 years, in this case the upcoming 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. Pope John Paul II specifically says in his accompanying letter that "As we prepare for the beginning of the Third Millennium of Christianity, the Church is aware that the joy of a Jubilee is above all the joy that is based on the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and neighbour." The Jubilee context of the document comprises both the explicit Christian-Muslim millennium commemorations and the unspoken but understood 50th anniversary of Israeli statehood. The moral, religious and historical framework of Jubilee allows us to address the grievous events of the Holocaust within the much wider human context of good and evil, of crime and punishment, and of suffering and rebirth. Rooted in the Jewish narratives of the Old Testament, Jubilee is an opportunity for all believers to come together to thank God, do penance for past sins, seek forgiveness, and promote reconciliation all around. Sounds to me like a pretty humanistic context that is worth exploring, rather than rejecting out of hand.

The act of remembering is demanded of all people, in all situations where one's personal or collective acts require moral judgement and cleansing, so that we can work for a better future for all in which "never again will selfishness and hatred grow to the point of sowing such suffering and death."

Fifth, the Pope specifically asks Catholics (and all people, in fact) "to purify their hearts, through repentance of past errors and infidelities...to place themselves humbly before the Lord and examine themselves on the responsibility which they too have for the evils of our time." The specific call by the Pope himself for Christian repentance for one's errant behaviour during the Holocaust and the "evils of our time" is pretty powerful moral stuff — about as high as one can get on the ladder of admitting responsibility for one's own sinful behaviour and asking forgiveness (though the document also appropriately mentions some of the church's many public acts against Nazism, and to save Jewish lives).

Sixth, the document emphasises the importance of remembering past sins. It notes that "the common future of Jews and Christians demands that we remember, for [quoting the Pope] 'there is no future without memory'." The act of remembering is demanded of all people, in all situations where one's personal or collective acts require moral judgement and cleansing, so that we can work for a better future for all in which "never again will selfishness and hatred grow to the point of sowing such suffering and death." The document says that "we wish to turn awareness of past sins into a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian sentiment among Jews, but rather a shared mutual respect..." The document is appropriately framed within reciprocal and universal moral dictates, which is what the Abrahamic religions are all about, it seems to me.

Seventh, the Vatican statement says that the church "repudiates every persecution against a people or human group anywhere, at any time," and, "absolutely condemns all forms of genocide." It mentions others this century who have suffered grievously, such as Armenians, Ukrainians, gypsies, and victims of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, China, Cambodia and elsewhere. It adds an important note about the world today: "Nor can we forget the drama of the Middle East, the elements of which are well known. Even as we make this reflection, 'many human beings are still their brothers' victims'" [quoting the Pope in January 1994]. This important statement on responsibility, remorse and repentance for past sins against the Jewish people is also a moral and political statement about unacceptable actions by many today in the Middle East, including Arabs and Israelis, Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Eighth, the Catholic Church says that it "desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance (teshuva), since, as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children." The desire to repent for past sins is linked with the universal and timeless nature of just moral action. The Vatican invites "all men and women of goodwill to reflect deeply on the significance of the Shoah," affirming that the victims who died and the survivors today "have become a loud voice calling the attention of all humankind."

It is striking how the common Arab accusation that the Vatican went too far in admitting its people's sins to the Jews are offset by the common Jewish-Israeli accusation that the Vatican did not go far enough in formally apologising to and asking forgiveness from the Jewish people. Between these two traumatized Arab and Israeli poles is a powerful moral middle ground that should not be missed or marginalised; this middle ground expressed by the Vatican could help to heal the criminal traumas of the past, rights the wrongs of today, and build a better future for all — a future in which we apply consistently and everywhere the concept of a universal morality, emanating from our common God, measured by a single standard of behaviour, and valid for all human beings, in all lands.

Arabs and Israelis alike should make the effort to understand the full, magnanimous meaning of the Vatican statement and its many implications, rather than merely to use it as a convenient mirror against which we simultaneously reflect the shattered images of our tormented past.

How Balfour failed both Jews and Arabs

By Robert Fisk

BRITAIN'S HONEYMOON in Palestine was short-lived. It began with Allenby's triumphant entry into Jerusalem in 1917 and ended, in Churchill's own words in the "hell disaster" of 1948. Both Jew and Arab were betrayed by the empire which was given a League of Nations protectorate in the Holy Land in the aftermath of the World War I.

Britain had promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine — but had also promised the Arabs freedom in all their lands in return for their support in the war against the Ottoman Turks. In reality, we broke our promise to both of them.

The Arabs watched Britain retreat from its obligations in the face of the U.N.'s vote for an Israeli state; the Jews found that they got only half of Palestine — although Balfour had indicated that the whole of the territory might be their homeland. And when 700,000 Arab Palestinians fled their homes in what was to become Israel, we watched and — save for a few shots fired in defence of Haifa — forgot the victims.

Even today, the ruthless war fought out between Jew and Briton and our failure to honour our promises to the Arabs — antagonise relations between Britain and Israel and between Britain and the Arabs. Neither side can forget what happened 50 years ago. Jews murdered Britons and Britons beat and hanged and sometimes murdered Jews. Arabs and Jews slaughtered each other for the land under Britain's control. When the last British troops packed their kit bags, they symbolised the end of empire and the end of any serious British role in Middle East politics for a generation. Many of them left under fire.

It all seemed simpler when Balfour made his declaration, anxious at the time to persuade world Jewry (especially in the United States) to support the Allied cause against Germany. "His Majesty's Government," he said, "view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object..." Less attention was taken to Balfour's warning that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice (sic) of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."

And so it turned out. As Arab suspicion and then fury increased against the British, as they allowed European Jews into Palestine, so Jewish frustration increased at the British restrictions on immigration. Throughout World War II, Jew and Arab largely declared a ceasefire; many joined the British army. Their graves lie together at Alamein — though when the then British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind insisted that the Israelis should be allowed to commemorate their dead on the 50th anniversary in 1992, five Israeli flags — but not a single Palestinian flag — fluttered over the battlefield.

As Arab suspicion and then fury increased against the British, as they allowed European Jews into Palestine, so Jewish frustration increased at the British restrictions on immigration.

Mosbe Dayan, future warrior of Israel, lost his eye to a Vichy French sniper liberating Lebanon 1941.

Even before the war ended, the Palestine conflict resumed with bloodthirsty intent. In 1944, Jewish gunmen assassinated Britain's minister-resident in Cairo, Lord Moyne. The Observer blamed "Jewish fascism." In 1946, Menachem Begin's Jewish militants in Jerusalem blew up the King David Hotel, headquarters of British forces in Palestine — a "terrorist" act if ever there was one, the ninth most horrific this century, according to the British. It killed 91 including Arabs and Jews. The Jewish agency denounced the bombing — though few Jews could forget how Britain persuaded the Turks to prevent East European Jews travelling through the Bosphorus to Palestine in their flight from the Nazis. Those Britons who had fought and died to liberate the death camps of Europe were now being attacked by the survivors in Palestine. The British hanged Jews for "terrorism." The historian Martin Gilbert, in his new history of Israel, recalls the names of three: Avshalom Haviv, Yaakov Weiss and Meir Nakar.

In revenge, the Jews hanged two British army sergeants — whose names, Marvin Paice and Clifford Martin, are not recorded by Mr. Gilbert in his new book. Their bodies were booby-trapped after their strangulation.

"Must Our Boys Die?" the Daily Mail asked, urging an early retreat. The Mail got its way. The Times commented with prescience that the violence in Palestine was "a fan to flame the smouldering resentment of the Arabs who campaign already that they are victimised by terrorism and now threaten in their turn to resort to force." The British left behind them a resentful Israel and a cruelly dispossessed community of Palestinians, most of whom held deeds to their land issued by the British mandate authorities as well as the Ottomans. Their brown Palestine passports were identical to those of the British, complete with lion and unicorn and "Dieu et Mon Droit" at the top. But they had no rights. The British, for all their World War I promises of independence for the Arabs, no more protected the Arabs of their mandate than the Jews.

— The Independent

LETTERS

Fitting the situation

To the editor:

I REFER to Ms. Habiby's letter to the editor (Jordan Times, April 14) and Mr. Avraham Nahoumi's related letter of April 16.

The prompt comment by Mr. Nahoumi shows the sensitivity and alertness of the Jews to any attempt at reviving interest in the protocols.

However, without having to research any further, circumstantial evidence proves their validity today as they did to Henry Ford some sixty years ago, in the New York World Feb. 17, 1921.

When asked about their validity, Ford said: "The only statement I care to make about the protocols is that they fit in with what is going on. They are sixteen-years-old and they have fitted the world situation up to this time."

They fit it now.

Fuad Farradj,
Former Deputy
Jordan Parliament

Contentious element

To the editor:

I APPLAUD Gwynne Dyer for providing a synopsis of the controversial and occasionally absurd debate surrounding the 8,400 year-old human skeleton found in Kennewick (U.S.) Jordan Times, April 19. However, Mr. Dyer does not address a very contentions element of the story, one that is essentially the source of the problem. He, along with most other popular media in the U.S., fails to problematise the use of the term "Caucasoid" and the assumption of race as avalid biological concept. For at least the past 25 years, and officially since 1996, physical and biological anthropologists have proclaimed the concept of racial "types" (e.g. Mongoloid, Caucasoid, Negroid, etc.) to be biologically false. Studies across world populations on blood types, morphological features, etc. have proved that there is in fact more variation within these so-called "types" than between the different categories. Dr. Jim Chatters, the first investigator of the Kennewick remains, is a forensic anthropologist. In the U.S., forensic anthropologists have to describe skeletal remains by fitting them into certain cultural categories used by law enforcement agencies to describe human beings in the United States (e.g. white/Caucasoid, black/Negroid, etc.). These modern culturally-defined terms, however, do not accurately describe biological diversity in ancient populations. Instead, it is more accurate to discuss population diversity in terms of comparing the frequency of a combination of genetic traits within and between populations. I, along with probably the majority of anthropologists, cringe when the media lightly throws around a term that is so loaded and politically charged, and frankly, that is false.

Megan A. Perry
Research Fellow
American Center of Oriental Research
Amman.

A nation held hostage to history

Patrick Cockburn, **writing on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel, explains why the military victory of 1967 has become a curse for Israelis today.**

THE VERDICT on the first half century of the history of the state of Israel came two-and-a-half-years before the official anniversary. It was delivered by Yigal Amir, a nationalist student at a religious university, who fired two shots into the back of Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister, as he left a peace rally in Tel Aviv in 1995.

Few assassins have been so successful in achieving their aim. The death of Rabin meant that Israel would not fully end the occupation of the West Bank and the isolation of Gaza. Some 5.4 million Israelis would continue effectively to control the lives of 2.8 million Palestinians. Palestinian self-determination would be denied. The legacy of the past would continue to dominate the present.

Fulfillment of the Oslo accords of 1993 would not have changed anything which had happened in 1948: the independence of Israel and catastrophe for the majority of Palestinians, forced to flee their homes and not allowed to return. It offered nothing to the 3.5 million Palestinians of the diaspora. It did, however, offer back part of what Israel conquered in 1967, in a victory which it has spent 30 years trying, not very successfully, to absorb.

The relationship between occupiers and occupied established at this time has dominated the Israeli political agenda ever since. It produced continual friction between Israelis and Palestinians, ensured a militarised mentality in Israel, gave preeminence to the security organs of the state, led to the legalisation of torture and debased standards of government. Yossi Beilin, Israel's leading dove and the architect of the Oslo accords, said: "Israel's sensational victory of 1967 became a curse."

It is a curse likely to continue. For Benyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, the lessons of the past are as valid today as they were when first experienced. He holds that friction with Arab states is inevitable. He believes Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, his predecessors, were pursuing a chimera in imagining that normal relations with Arab states were ever really possible. The way to handle the Palestinians is to show Israeli strength, "lower their expectations" and make them grateful for whatever they receive.

So far, Mr. Netanyahu's policy has worked better than many of his opponents expected. Apart from the fighting which followed the opening of a tunnel under the Muslim quarter in occupied Jerusalem in 1996, which left more than 60 dead, there has been little bloodshed. But there is no sign of Palestinian expectations diminishing. The competing authority of the Palestinian [National] Authority and Israel on the West Bank produces, in the long-term, chronic instability.

The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin was also a verdict on the way Israeli society had developed over the previous 48 years. The central divide in Israeli politics has always been between the religious and the secular, between those who go to the synagogue often and those who seldom go at all. This is complicated and deepened by the division between Jews, from Russia and Eastern Europe, with a strong secular culture and who set up the state, and those from the Middle East, whose Jewish identity was entirely religious.

But the melting pot had worked in a peculiar way. After 1967 it produced a lethal blend of territorial nationalism and religious revivalism. The settlers in the West Bank, though small in number, were the shock-troops of the right. They believed that the West Bank was Judea and Samaria, was the land given by God to the Jews. They consciously wanted to make the settler the prototype of the Israeli of the future, replacing the left-wing kibbutznik in the Israeli pantheon.

Palestinians cross the demolished King Hussein Bridge into Jordan in the wake of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Egyptian Sinai and part of the Syrian Golan Heights in 1967 (United Nations photo)

In this they have had some success. But, more important, since 1977 it has become extremely difficult for Labour to win an election in Israel. Too many of the voting blocs — ultra-Orthodox, Russians, Jews originating in the Middle East — are aligned against it. Labour only just won the election in 1992 with a strong leader and support from the U.S. This is unlikely to recur. Political divisions within Israeli society are not growing any less. But they are unlikely to have a significant impact unless Mr. Netanyahu gets Israel involved in a war on the West Bank or elsewhere.

Armed conflict with the Palestinians is possible, but war with neighbouring Arab states is unlikely. Israel has peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and everything which followed the 1982 invasion of Lebanon has given the Israeli public a lasting distaste for involvement in Lebanese affairs. Despite Israel's military superiority over its neighbours, it has not won a war since 1973. The Israeli influence on the rest of the Middle East is largely exercised through the U.S.

Israel has far greater strength than the Palestinians, but the Palestinians have the ability to deny Israelis lasting peace. There is no sign that they have receded in any way from their demand for self-determination. Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, has built the nucleus of a Palestinian mini-state in Gaza, though restrained by Israeli restrictions and his own Puritanian style of rule. But relations between Israelis and Palestinians continue to deteriorate, with increasing effect on the politics of the 850,000 Israeli Arabs.

Israel was a state created by force in 1948. Palestinians were forced to flee and not allowed to return. The nation created was relatively homogenous. But victory in 1967 again brought large numbers of Palestinians under the rule of Israel, which could not expel them and did not want to create a bi-national state by annexing the area and giving them full civil and political rights.

For 20 years the occupation continued with limited Palestinian resistance. But the outbreak of the intifada in 1987 showed that this could not continue. Israel became wholly absorbed in holding the occupied territories. Oslo was an attempt to escape from this dilemma, to move to a new and less bitter stage in the history of relations between Israel and the Palestinians.

It failed. The process was too long. Its opponents — Israeli settlers and Islamic suicide bombers — had six years in which to derail it by bomb and bullet. They used both. In 1994 Baruch Goldstein, a settler in Hebron, killed 29 Palestinians as they prayed in the Al Ibrahimi Mosque. Hamas responded with suicide bombers who killed more than 100 Israelis in two years.

The past proved impossible to escape. For many Palestinians, what they gained in the 1990s was dwarfed by what they lost in 1948. For many Israelis the gains of 1967 were too sweet to disgorge 30 years later. Some believed that doing so was against the will of God. This explains why there is so little celebration among Israelis on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the state. It is as if they suspect that a past full of violence is going to repeat itself.

Rising number of U.S. Muslims threatens to displace Jewish lobby

By Mary Dejevsky

IN LITTLE more than a decade, the number of Muslims in the United States is set to overtake the number of Jews, in a shift that has far-reaching implications for America's domestic and foreign policy.

By 2010, it is estimated that the U.S. Muslim population —, which has risen from an estimated 0.4 per cent of the population to almost 1.4 per cent today — will pass the declining number of Jews. The 1997 Britannica Book of the Year gives only proportions, saving Jews, who accounted for 3.3 per cent of the population in the mid-seventies, will account for only 2 per cent in 2000. By 2010, it projects, the proportions of Muslims and Jews will have switched.

Figures obtained from Jewish and Muslim organisations, however, suggest the crossing point may already have been reached. They give similar figures for their current numbers — about 6 million each. The U.S. Census Bureau does not record statistics by religion or culture. But what is incontestable, is that in purely numerical terms the position of Jews and Muslims is being reversed.

The increase in Muslim numbers reflects partly immigration from the Indian subcontinent and north Africa in the sixties and seventies, but also the accelerating rate of conversion by American blacks. Converts are estimated to account for half the present number of Muslims and the number of converts is increasing fast.

If it were just a matter of numbers, the effect of this shift might be limited. The prominence of American Jews has long enabled them to punch above their weight in politics and business. But the Muslims are catching up. The growing influence of U.S. Muslims is reported in Newsweek magazine, which stresses the vitality of what it calls the "new Islam" — an Americanised blend of the strands of Islam which has little truck with restrictions on women. "The U.S. is arguably the best place on earth to be Muslim," the report says. "Multicultural democracy, with its guarantees of religious freedom and speech, makes life easier for Muslims than in many Islamic states in the Middle East."

It is in foreign priorities where the demographic shift may be felt most keenly. Already, the coolness between Israel's present government and Washington has clipped U.S. wings in the Middle East.

It says Muslims are emerging in the professions and as a cohesive voting bloc. U.S. Muslims, it concludes, may become a force to be reckoned with.

The demographic trend has not gone unnoticed by the White House. At the end of Ramadan, the president sent a message to the Islamic countries and American Muslims, and Hillary Clinton hosted a party for Muslim women.

It is in foreign priorities where the demographic shift may be felt most keenly. Already, the coolness between Israel's present government and Washington has clipped U.S. wings in the Middle East. It has also provoked divisions among American Jews about how Washington should proceed.

But while policy differences and declining numbers may weaken the celebrated "Jewish lobby," there is as yet no Islamic lobby to challenge for more influence. And Washington, still caught in the thicket of past hostilities with Iraq, Iran and Libya, is finding it hard to contemplate a change of direction. Within the decade, however, it may not be thirst for Middle East oil that pushes Washington to treat with Arabs, but a wealthy, vocal and streamlined lobby right in its midst.

— *The Independent*

King, Blair warn of serious consequences if peace process stalemate continues

(Continued from page 1)

"I hope very, very much indeed that we will continue in the same way," said the King.

Mr. Blair emphasised "how strong relations are between Britain and Jordan and how we wish to see that relationship deepened and strengthened even further in the coming period."

Earlier on Sunday, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan accompanied Mr. Blair on a visit of the Baqaa refugee camp, north of Amman, home to around 80,000 Palestinian victims of the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict.

Prince Hassan and Mr. Blair, cheered by enthusiastic crowds and a multitude of children that security and police could hardly contain, visited the camp facilities, including a medical centre set up by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and drank coffee in a private home.

The Crown Prince, accompanied by HRH Prince Rashed, said the visit was aimed at giving Mr. Blair a first-hand idea of the plight of the refugees.

"I saw for myself tremendous unmet needs there," the British premier told reporters, "which cry out for a proper humanitarian solution."

The two also visited a bakery set up by the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) to provide women in Baqaa with jobs and independent incomes.

Lawrice Hlass, a YWCA founding member, told the Jordan Times that the income-generating project, inaugurated by Princess Sarwath at the end of 1996, was aimed "at creating employment for women in the camp, so that they can earn and live a decent life."

"It is the first time that women are employed in a bakery, as it is usually a men's job. Now it is women's, and they are all from the camp," stressed Ms. Hlass, who has also served as Jordan's first woman ambassador.

Jordan is by far the largest host country to Palestinian refugees.

According to UNRWA, around 1.3 million people, accounting for over 40 per cent of the total number of Palestinian refugees, found shelter within its border. However, only 350,000 of them are currently residing in 12 camps, scattered all over the Kingdom.

Jordan is also UNRWA's largest donor country. Its annual expenditure — $380 million — to provide refugees with a dignified life until they regain their legitimate right to return and/or compensation, exceeds the agency's annual budget — $360 million — official figures show.

UNRWA has been on the verge of shutting its medical and educational services to the refugees due to a huge financial deficit, and Jordan has repeated its appeals to donor countries for more contributions.

Mr. Blair told reporters after his visit to the Baqaa camp that Britain was "in the process of considering increasing" its six million pound (JD5.4) annual contribution to UNRWA.

Arafat welcomes Blair's call for high-level talks in London

(Continued from page 1)

told Prime Minister Blair that it should be a meeting that is prepared for and not another attempt by Israel to buy time."

If Blair succeeds in arranging Mideast talks in London, he will have achieved a key objective of his first visit to the region — raising the European profile in the negotiations.

Fresh from his triumph in Northern Ireland, Mr. Blair said Monday he hoped to contribute by bringing the sides back to the negotiating table.

"What is frustrating at the moment for the people of the Middle East is that there does not appear to be a [peace] process at all," Mr. Blair told high school students in Gaza City.

"Now I hope very much that in the next few weeks, there will be meetings that can take place in London or elsewhere where people can hammer out an agreement," Mr. Blair said.

The Palestinians support greater European involvement, but Israel and the United States oppose bringing another party into the talks.

Mr. Blair is a political ally of U.S President Bill Clinton, and reiterated Monday that he was not trying to upstage the Americans as the chief mediators in the negotiations.

"I think that Britain has a role, but that it should not cross with that of the United States, but should complement it," he said.

The British leader apparently hopes to achieve progress on side issues, such as the opening of a Palestinian sea port or a Gaza industrial park. Both projects have been held up because of disagreements with Israel over security arrangements.

It was not clear how much of a role Britain would seek in the talks on a West Bank troop withdrawal, the key issue.

Mr. Netanyahu on Monday told his Cabinet that the Europeans would be bosts, but not be involved in the negotiations, the deputy defence minister, Silvan Shalom, told Israel Radio.

Sources in Israel said there was no U.S.-British coordination concerning a London summit on a specific date.

The British leader was warmly received in Gaza City on Monday, with the streets decked out with British and Palestinian flags. "Welcome, Palestine's important guest," read a banner at a Gaza City high school where he was greeted with cheers.

In an unusual gesture, Mr. Arafat drove close to the Erez crossing between Israel and the coastal strip to receive the visitor.

The two leaders were expected to sign an anti-terrorism agreement under which the European Union would send instructors to train the Palestinian security forces.

Jordan urges neighbours to stop infiltration attempts

(Continued from page 1)

nal affairs in any form, and we expect others to reciprocate," Dr. Ensour said during his weekly news briefing.

Most of the weekly tabloid press carried reports in the past few weeks detailing infiltration attempts from Syria by Hizbollah fighters.

These reports were not confirmed by the government.

The Kingdom's ties with Syria deteriorated following Jordan's October 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

High-ranking Syrian officials have criticised Jordan in the past two years, including Syria's Vice President Abdul Haleem Khaddam, Defence Minister Mustafa Tlass and others.

Despite these criticism, Jordan has refrained from countering the statements and has always said it wants to maintain good relationship with its northern neighbour.

During his visit to Syria in 1996, His Majesty King Hussein reportedly handed President Hafez Assad a report on infiltration attempts by armed groups from Syria.

Tal highlights importance of disclosure and transparency regulations at AFM

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan Securities Commission (JSC) Deputy Chairman Hisham Tal Monday said the disclosure and transparency regulations (DTR) will protect and encourage investments in the country.

Mr. Tal said the regulations, which appeared in the Official Gazette Tuesday, will also regulate the trading at the Amman Financial Market (AFM).

The new regulations will enable local and foreign investors to obtain necessary information about the firms listed on the stock exchange.

The regulations covering eight sections tackling wide disclosure requirements, include:

Listing of firms at the AFM, supplying dealers with financial periodical reports, material information, insider trading, acceptability standards, auditing standards, auditing qualifications and other general provisions.

The regulations have been issued according to the provisions of articles 9 and 53 of the new securities law of 1997.

It also includes the instructions related to auditing standards and auditors' and brokers' regulations for public shareholding firms.

An AFM official said the new instructions aim at increasing transparency and providing investors with wider and important information, especially those related to the financial standings of the public shareholding companies listed at the market.

"This will enhance the investors' confidence in the securities market in line with international auditing standards," the sources added.

"The issuance of disclosure instructions comes in line with the task of the commission to review all applicable regulations dealing with the securities market," Mr. Tal said. "With the objective of protecting investors and enhancing the credibility of the capital market in Jordan." The new regulations will require the listed firms to announce their net profits, revenues and other details about the performance of the company and the major shareholders.

In addition, the firms are required to submit half-yearly reports showing their balance sheets, profits or losses and any changes in the shareholders' rights in addition to other details.

Listed firms are also required to notify the JSC about any change in their administration and the shares owned by members of the management.

The 1997 figures showed that trading at the AFM increased by 42 per cent compared with the previous year as the total volume amounted to JD355 million, up from JD249 million.

The value of shares that were bought by non-Jordanian investors amounted JD100 million in the past year compared to JD26 million in 1996 with a net investment of JD57 million in 1997 compared with JD9 million in the previous year.

Saudi minister says fundamentals good despite oil price weakness

ABU DHABI (R) — Saudi Finance and National Economy Minister Ibrahim Al Assaf has said the kingdom's economic fundamentals were strong despite recent oil price weakness.

"This is not the first time oil prices have fluctuated...we have faced more difficult challenges and overcome them in the past and I believe we are now in a better position to face them than we have been," he told a conference in Abu Dhabi.

"Short-term developments have not fundamentally altered the long-term growth rate...despite current instability in the oil markets, the economic fundamentals are sound," he stressed.

Nevertheless, Mr. Assaf told Reuters the world's largest crude producer and exporter, which relies on oil for three-quarters of state income, was revising its economic growth predictions.

Asked for his forecasts on GDP (gross domestic product) growth and the current account, Mr. Assaf said: "We are working on the figures now. We have to revise the figures. I can't give you any numbers now."

Saudi Arabia has been feeling the pinch of weak oil prices, which tumbled 45 per cent in six months before rallying slightly after major oil producers said they would cut output.

Following two years of windfall oil earnings, economists expect Saudi economic growth to slow this year, after expanding by a nominal seven per cent last year. They say the current account surplus — at around $232 million last year — could be wiped out if oil prices do not remain strong throughout 1998.

Saudi oil is currently trading at around $13 a barrel, compared to the $14.50-$15 on which the 1998 budget is thought to be based. Every dollar below the Saudi forecast price means some $2.5 billion forfeited by the kingdom annually.

Asked if Saudi Arabia planned to cut spending or borrow more to meet its budget this year, Mr. Assaf declined comment, saying: "I left the budgetary headaches in Riyadh."

He said Saudi Arabia was working to lessen reliance on oil, whose share of GDP was now less than half its level 20 years ago.

Stressing that the kingdom's "measured pace" in economic reform should not be construed as complacency, he said: "We are continuing our quiet effort to rationalise government expenditure and gradually remove unnecessary subsidies."

The kingdom was revising foreign investment and tax laws and working to cut customs duties as part of efforts to lure investment and become a world trade organisation member.

Mr. Assaf said privatisation of state assets was planned, with ministers working to put state firms on a commercial footing.

"The decision has been made to transfer selected economic activities to the private sector," he said. "This should attract new international business partners to the region."

The privatisation of telecommunications was proceeding apace and was due to be completed by June 17, Mr. Assaf said.

Although the focus was on developing the private sector, Mr. Assaf said Saudi Arabia "has not neglected the complementary role the public sector can and should take."

"The government will continue to support private sector activity and will step in when necessary," he emphasised.

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All of Kuwait could become free trade zone — PM

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait said Monday it could turn the entire Arab Gulf state into a free trade zone as part of long-awaited ambitious plans to liberalise the economy and open it to foreign investments.

Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah promised that his government "would adopt structural reforms needed for...continued growth of the economy."

Sheikh Saad was addressing the first conference by Kuwaiti businessmen who are discussing ways to speed up the granting of the private sector a greater role in the largely state-controlled economy.

He said reforms "and opening up to the outside world includes developing the free zone and studying the possibility of considering the entire country a free trade zone."

Kuwait has been studying a new draft law to start such a zone but differences and recent internal political crises have delayed its actual opening.

"The idea of a free trade zone in Kuwait was first introduced in 1961. Where are we now? Still discussing while others are moving forward." Kuwaiti economist Jassem Al Saadoun, who will address the conference Tuesday, told Reuters.

Another delegate said: "The government is saying the private sector needs to reform itself to be able to play its aspired role while the private sector is saying the government is moving too slowly on reforms, liberalisation, free zone...."

Sheikh Saad said the government would adopt laws to regulate foreign investment and develop industrial projects. Kuwait's economy depends almost solely on petroleum exports.

He called for "real cooperation" between the government and an elected parliament after repeated clashes in recent years, stressing that economic reforms must not affect the living standard of Kuwaitis who enjoy a generous welfare system.

"There is a vital need to know in advance the expected negative effects on the work and income of Kuwaitis" he said in an apparent reference to plans to eventually privatise strategic basic services like water, power and telephones.

Since 1994 the state has divested several local firms, selling shares worth more than $3 billion. Other local holdings valued at some $2 billion are also earmarked for privatisation.

But the programme has yet to move to the controversial and more complex privatisation of the heavily subsidised basic services which are used as employment centres for Kuwaitis.

Parliament has yet to discuss a draft law to regulate the next privatisation stage, a much debated and amended law which is now expected to be passed by the end of 1998.

The state, which spends more than half of its 2.6 billion dinar ($8.5 billion) oil revenue on salaries, employs some 93 per cent of Kuwaitis in the workforce who earn high salaries compared to the private sector.

Some 35 per cent of the 2.15 million population are Kuwaitis. According to 1995 figures, only 17.5 per cent of a total workforce of 950,000 are Kuwaitis.

PARTNERSHIP IN EXCELLENCE

THIS IS a special programme initiated by Marriott Hotels worldwide, designed to build a closer relationship with our customers. It is a one-day tour behind the scenes, where our customer experience and understand how each department at the Amman Marriott Hotel is managed and how the hotel operates. The 3rd session this year took place on April 2nd, 98 and this will be conducted on a quarterly basis.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Early meetings should be productive. You'll have good advice to give, which will benefit the whole group. You might even find yourself in a position of leadership again. If so, let somebody else handle the money. A Taurus would be better at that.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) If you can hold off a little longer, you're likely to get what you want. If you push, you probably won't. This evening, conditions are more in your favour. A friend's support makes you stronger, and luckier. You can use all the luck you can get.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You're pretty flexible, and you're going to be the one who has to give a little today. Unfortunately, several people have opinions about what you should be doing with your time. Don't you sometimes wish you could clone yourself, so you could be in two places at once?

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Once you get your financial situation straightened out, plan an adventure. You and your sweetheart need a vacation. A visit to friends or in-laws would be an excellent choice. Meanwhile, check into something you're thinking of buying. Do a little reading on the subject.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) During the morning, strong individuals in your life may think they've found the opening to tell you how they really feel. Don't worry. You can turn this game around on them. Ask for their advice. This way you stay in control, bot you still may hear something useful.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You've got a busy day ahead of you. You could run into a technical breakdown, so don't take anything for granted. Always have a backup system available. Speaking of backups, if you're working on a computer, make sure you back everything up several times. That's a good babit to develop.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You'll be in the mood to work later in the day. If your job has flexible hours, you're in luck. In the morning, however, anything but being with your sweetheart will feel like an outrageous inconvenience. Best not to let the client or boss know that, however.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Something you don't want anymore would be the perfect gift for a friend. Don't take any money for it. You'll get more for it in bargaining chips than you would in casb. Later tonight, you and your sweetheart need to spend a little quality time together.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) What you need today are facts. That's the only way to convince a co-worker you know what you're talking about. It's also the only way to beat out your competition — possibly the same person, by the way. You're smart and patient. Use those traits to get your point across.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) There's a conflict between love and money. Does your sweetheart want to buy something you don't think is a good idea, or is it the other way around? Figure out what you need and wbat you don't, and how much it all costs. Don't worry. The day has a happy ending.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You can do a lot of those household projects yourself. You have the money, but there's no need to spend it. Talk it over with a knowledgeable relative and be willing to learn. What starts out as a confrontation could end up as a valuable learning experience and a big money saver. Go for it.

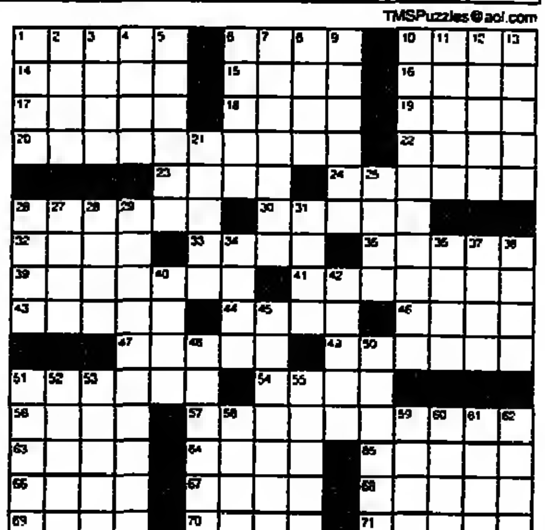
PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Take your time and do things right. You may not get a chance to do them over, especially if you're dealing with a large company or bureaucracy. It might be better to wait until tomorrow. If that's not possible, just shift your decisions to as late in the day as you can.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

FOR RELEASE APRIL 20, 1998

THE Daily Crossword
Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



By Vivian O. Collins
Albany, GA

ACROSS
1 One of the Three Stooges
6 Crazy
10 Ditty
14 "__ di Lammermoor"
15 Tel __
16 Like Nash's lama
17 Extreme discomfort
18 Empty space
19 Caspian feeder
20 Train unit with low sides
22 Actress Moreno
23 Salesman's wares
24 Whinnies
26 Corkwood trees
30 Rose sticker
32 First gardener
33 Church projection
35 Monsters
39 Bitter regret
41 Self-centered
43 Slithering hisser
44 Speak
46 Choir voice
47 __ tube
49 Civil disturbance
51 "Jane Eyre" author
54 Masculine
56 Tediously protracted
57 Urban transportation
63 Power, in brief
64 Track
65 Hand truck
66 Seaweed
67 Bologna money
68 Succumb to time and tide
69 Russian ruler
70 Earthly paradise
71 French impressionist

DOWN
1 Smeltery waste
2 Victor, the writer
3 College subj.
4 Take offense
5 Bribe money
6 Cartoonist Wilson
7 Shorebirds with upturned beaks
8 __ monster
9 Entrance to Hades
10 Automobile of the 1920s
11 Remove bridles
12 Below in poems
13 Raines and Logan
21 Alther and Kudrow
25 End of switch?
26 Refuses entry
27 Arabian gulf
28 Tibetan monk
29 Train unit with ashtrays
31 Make well
34 Rose of baseball
36 Provoke
37 Beanery sign
38 Open position
40 Landlord's due
42 Cranium
45 Ornate wardrobe
48 Prickly plant
50 Required
51 Ewe call
52 Turns over and over
53 Petrozavodsk's lake
55 Mel, the sportscaster
58 Surprise attack
59 Eld
60 Stop up
61 "M*A*S*H" star
62 Cereal grasses

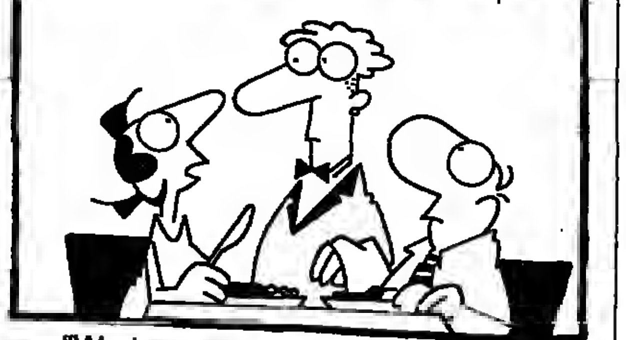
MARTHAS CURATOR
AMERICA ONELANE
RECIPES RIVETED
SLOES SPOTS TAD
AIRS WEANS HIRE
LAD MORSE GENTS
ASSAIL STRAIGHT
REFRESHED
TRAINEES ELIDES
ROSES COMAS ELL
ASPS SKUAS BLUE
USE SALTS GUISE
MICROBE STARLIT
ANTARES ENGRAVE
SISTERS STASHED

Peanuts

Andy Capp

Mutt'n'Jeff

THE BETTER HALF.
By Glasbergen



"We have nothing to talk about. Can you move us near a table worth eavesdropping on?"

JUMBLE
THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

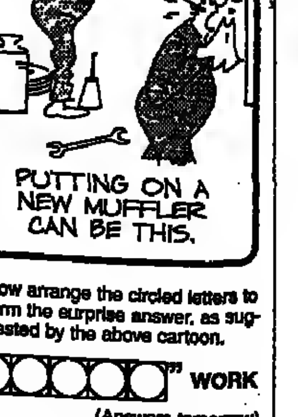
Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

YUMST

KLEAN

GAHOME

BOCIXE



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer: "□□□□□□□□□□" WORK

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: TARDY MOURN BLUISH GATHER
Answer: What the owner considered the electrician's comment — "LIGHT" HUMOR

Busine

A review c

Two-day holid
lower product

REUTERS
The Business

Major Currencies & Cross

Currency	USD
US Dollar	-
DE Mark	0.5547
GB Sterling	1.6766
CH Franc	0.6685
JP Yen	0.0076
CA Dollar	0.7005
IT Lira	0.0006
NL Guilder	0.4925
FR Franc	0.1655

Middle Ea

Currency	USD	JOD
US Dollar	-	0.7090
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1890
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8806
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1947
Kuwait Dinar	3.2760	2.3227
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4643
Egyptian	0.2927	0.2076

Energy

Oils	Last	revious
Brent	13.97	14.19
W. Texas	15.63	15.45
Bonny	13.97	14.19
Dubai	12.65	12.77
NL Gas	158.00	159.00

JOD Cross Rates

Currency	Buy	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
GB Sterling	1.1909	1.1969
DE Mark	0.3911	0.3931
CH Franc	0.4718	0.4742
FR Franc	0.1167	0.1173
JP Yen	0.5349	0.5376
NL Guilder	0.3474	0.3491
IT Lira	0.3958	0.3978

Source: Central Bank of Jordan

JORDAN M

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Grindlays
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Sweifieh Tel

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Two-day holiday in Jordan seen to cause lower productivity and weaker efficiency

** ADMINISTRATIVE DEVELOPMENT Minister Bassam Emoush is against the idea of a two-day holiday per week at government departments arguing that such a system would undoubtedly result in lower productivity and idling part of the state economy. "The civil servant, despite the current working hours does oot fulfill his/her duties. So what would the situation be when working hours are extended," he asked. Mr. Emoush said the performance and the productivity of civil servants would certainly decline.

He indicated that the experiment to have two-day holidays at schools proved not to be beoeficial as it encouraged students to unproductive issues.

Issam Bdeir, board chairman of the Jordan Electric Power Company, says that a two-day holiday would cut Jordan off the outside world for four days pointing out that the Kiogdom's production is not that high to warrant such a step. He indicated that a two-day holiday would lower output despite extending the working hours during the other days. "The Jordanian employee does not work efficiently during the normal current working hours," he said.

Economist Akram Karmoul said the two-day holiday may suit the situation in the private sector but not the public sector. "The idea is good to the private sector on condition that the lost hours from an extra day holiday be compensated by exteoding the hours during work days," he added emphasising that such an arrangement would not have any negative effect on the economy as some people think.

Dr. Karmoul also emphasised that it is not possible to increase the holidays for the public sector in order not to delay executing transactions for a long time. "It is not feasible to exteod the working hours at the public sector because the productivity of the workers diminishes before 1 p.m.," he said noting that a prolonged public sector holiday would cut us off from the outside world for four days.

Economist Hani Saudi sees a decision approving a two-day holiday would be illogical and would not be in the interest of the country nor with the social and financial standards. "This matter should not be thought of in Jordan in the first place," he said. "Jordan is a poor and developing country and needs many stages before deciding on a two-day holiday." Mr. Saudi saw such a decision leading to higher levels of poverty and unemploymeot.

Abdul Wahab Abu Hijleh, an industrialist, said Jordan is a developing country and, consequently, a two-day holiday would lower productivity especially when the Kingdom's resources are limited and production is low.

Another industrialists, Mohammad Al Muhtaseb, said the Kingdom has not reached a high level of prosperity and productivity in order to ask for relaxaöoo and demand a two-day holiday. "We should increase working hours to boost our productivity and competitivity," he said. "We are still unable to level up to advanced European countries by taking a two-day holiday."

Mr. Al Muhtaseb concluded by poioting out that the productivity and efficiency of the Jordanian labourer is much lower than his European counterpart in advanced countries and consequently "we need to work more and increase working hours especially in the government sector (Al Dustour).

REUTERS REUTERS
The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates Prices as at ...... 20/04/98 18:42.

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.8027	0.5964	1.4952	132.36	1.4276	1782.00	2.0299	6.0437
DE Mark	0.5547	-	0.3306	0.8293	73.42	0.7915	988.08	1.1258	3.3519
GB Sterling	1.6766	3.0236	-	2.5067	221.99	2.3935	2987.52	3.4031	10.1323
CH Franc	0.6688	120.51	0.3984	-	88.50	0.9542	1191.02	135.67	4.0394
JP Yen	0.0076	1.3609	0.4501	1.1293	-	1.0778	13.45	153.24	4.5627
CA Dollar	0.7005	1.2916	0.4225	1.0566	1.08	-	1270.80	1.4551	4.3265
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0108	0.3343	0.0838	1348.07	0.8004	-	11.38	3.3887
NL Guilder	0.4926	88.80	0.2936	73.65	65.17	0.7029	877.44	-	2.9759
FR Franc	0.1655	0.2982	0.0986	24.7316	21.88	0.2361	33.58	33.5800	-

Middle Eastern Currencies

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7505	0.3770	3.6406	0.3053	3.6728	1527.00	3.4160
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2898	0.5317	5.1348	0.4305	5.1803	2153.74	4.9181
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1890	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0814	0.98	407.15	0.9108
Bahrain Dinar	2.95	1.8806	9.9483	-	9.66	0.8097	9.74	4050.40	9.0610
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1947	1.0302	1.0302	-	0.0838	1.01	419.44	0.9383
Kuwait Dinar	3.2760	2.3227	12.2867	1.2351	11.93	-	12.03	5002.46	0.8383
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0212	0.1026	0.9912	0.0831	-	415.76	0.9301
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4643	2.4561	0.2469	2.3842	0.1999	2.4052	-	2.2371
Egyptian	0.2927	0.2076	1.0979	0.1104	1.0657	0.0894	1.0752	447.01	-

Energy

Oils	Last	revious
Brent	13.97	14.19
W. Texas	15.63	15.45
Bonny	13.97	14.19
Dubai	12.65	12.77
UL Gas	158.00	159.00

Mid-East Currencies

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2666	0.4808	0.15905	0.39888	35.3182
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.49097	0.16241	0.40732	36.062
KW Dinar	3.2768	5.90667	1.95427	4.90196	434.028
BH Dinar	0.3770	4.7824	1.58228	3.96825	351.37
CY Pound	1.8923	3.4111	1.1282	2.8294	250.446

*** JOD Cross Rates**

Currency	Buy	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
GB Sterling	1.1909	1.1969
DE Mark	0.3911	0.3831
CH Franc	0.4718	0.4742
FR Franc	0.1167	0.1173
JP Yen	0.5349	0.5376
NL Guilder	0.3474	0.3491
IT Lira	0.3958	0.3978

* Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

Libor Fixing

Period / C'ncy	-1- Month	-3- Months	-6- Months	-1- Year
USD	5.6719	5.7422	5.7813	5.9063
GBP	7.4118	7.4948	7.4948	7.5000
JPY	0.6563	0.7500	0.7604	0.7813
DEM	3.6717	3.7968	3.9063	4.0624
FRF	3.5313	1.6458	1.7813	1.9583
CHF	1.4688	3.6367	3.7520	3.9688
ITL	5.5880	5.2280	4.8930	-

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SUNDAY 19/04/1998

	PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
	350.000	251.000	ARAB BANK	14.1	1.16	3	100	34400	244.00	344.00	-
	2.340	1.660	JOR.NATIONAL BK.	E	0.00	17	13350	23950	1.77	1.80	.03+
S	3.540	1.250	BANK OF JORDAN	4.1	0.00	5	1100	1468	1.35	1.20	.05-
	1.300	.890	MID.EAST INV.BK.	02.4	0.00	1	5000	4750	1.00	.95	.05-
S	2.680	1.650	INDUSTRIAL DEV.BK.	9.2	7.88	12	6787	12132	1.79	1.79	-
I	5.500	4.660	THE HOUSING BK.	18.1	3.51	94	38800	217617	5.45	5.70	.25+
5	4.180	1.790	JOR.KUWAIT BANK	.9	0.00	4	547	1006	1.84	1.85	.01+
	.920	.590	JOR.GULF BANK	4.0	10.29	19	25200	17186	.68	.68	-
S	4.020	1.750	JOR.ISLAMIC BANK	15.5	0.00	17	6003	10956	1.83	1.83	-
S	2.900	1.750	JOR.INV.FIN.BANK	11.2	0.00	2	1050	1030	1.75	1.75	-
N	2.250	1.610	JOR.INV.FIN.BANK/NEW	E	0.00	4	1600	2592	1.62	1.62	-
	1.400	.800	BEIT.AL-MAL (BEITNA)	.5	17.44	1	500	430	.07	.86	.01-
	BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 241.84	%CHG: +0.62	179	100037	228223			
	INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 123.07	%CHG: 0.00	1	38	99			
	2.240	1.550	JOR.ELECTRIC PWR.	10.7	5.02	14	14329	31268	2.17	2.19	.02+
+S	7.500	2.040	VHCLS. OWNERS FED.	11.9	4.14	1	100	290	3.04	2.90	.14-
	3.050	2.060	SHIPPING LINES	74.2	2.01	1	500	1050	2.10	2.10	-
	1.550	.960	NATL. PORTFOLIO	42.7	0.00	10	5200	5580	1.07	1.07	-
	4.600	2.890	ARAB INTL.INV.EDUC.	10.4	1.90	1	500	2100	4.20	4.20	-
	1.830	1.450	UNIFIED CO.	7.1	6.88	61	25600	40800	1.55	1.60	.05+
	.810	.600	UNION LAND DEV.	g	0.00	1	5000	3200	.67	.66	.01-
	SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 119.14	%CHG: +0.27	89	51229	04388			
	4.450	2.690	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	17.1	3.82	11	5650	16320	2.89	2.08	.01-
	7.050	5.620	ARAB POTASH CO.	28.1	3.51	5	13600	80220	5.75	5.70	.05-
	2.200	1.100	INDUSTRIAL COMM.AGR.	g	0.00	2	577	669	1.15	1.16	.01+
i	5.700	3.440	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	15.3	2.60	128	40373	223843	5.44	5.55	.11+
	1.520	1.020	JOR.PIPES MANFCT.	11.1	7.46	12	7400	9980	1.34	1.34	-
	6.350	4.400	DAR ALDAWA DV.INV.	7.3	5.79	5	2800	16891	5.95	6.05	.10+
	.570	.400	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	16.6	0.00	7	6650	3259	.49	.49	-
	1.110	.670	ARAB PAPER CONV.TRD.	22.0	0.00	3	1000	730	.72	.72	-
	.620	.510	NATIONAL INDS.	g	0.00	14	10600	6084	.58	.57	.01-
	.780	.370	INTERMED.PETRO.CHEM.	g	0.00	11	7750	3136	.40	.40	-
S	3.000	.920	NATL.CABLE WIRE.MFAC	27.9	0.00	5	1400	1622	1.17	1.16	.01-
	.790	.530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM	g	0.00	32	34900	20945	.61	.60	.01-
	1.560	1.150	ARAB PHARM.CHEM.	14.8	4.48	26	11691	15731	1.33	1.34	.01+
S	1.540	.810	UNIV. MODN.INDS.	14.4	6.67	2	500	450	.91	.90	.01-
	1.210	.680	JOR.INDS.RESOURCES	9.3	14.49	3	1300	895	.70	.69	.01-
	1.620	1.350	NATL. CHLORINE	10.2	6.80	5	6800	10062	1.46	1.47	.01+
	1.080	.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	14.4	9.80	31	58384	59433	1.01	1.02	.01+
	1.790	1.290	EL -ZAY READY WEAR	49.2	0.00	2	400	560	1.39	1.40	.01+
	1.250	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.7	0.00	10	6650	8164	1.20	1.22	.02+
	1.220	.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	10.4	0.00	15	9400	9913	1.05	1.04	.01-
-	.860	.660	JORDAN STEEL	9.2	8.54	8	2466	2037	.83	.82	.01-
	.790	.570	MID.EAST COMPLEX	7.3	16.95	24	39900	23546	.60	.59	.01-
	INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 109.25	%CHG: -0.30	360	270200	514586			
	GRAND TOTAL			INDEX: 170.16	%CHG: +0.29	629	421504	927396			

PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SUNDAY 19/04/1998

	HIGH	LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
N	1.050	.910	EXPORT & FIN.BNK.75%	17.2	0.00	11	7847	5335	.94	.93	.01-
N	1.230	1.050	ISLAMIC INSURANCE CO	P	0.00	5	4750	5500	1.16	1.15	.01-
	.520	.340	JOR.TRADE FAC.	g	0.00	17	02800	23913	.40	.41	.01+
	.800	.660	UNION INV. 50%	g	0.00	8	8280	2069	.75	.75	-
	.620	.260	ARAB FIN.INVEST.	g	0.00	14	17250	7073	.41	.41	-
	1.000	.720	AL-SHARQ INV.CO.	P	0.00	1	100000	100000	1.00	1.00	-
	.780	.610	AL-DAWLIYAH	.0	2.50	1	5000	2350	.68	.67	.01-
	.290	.120	JOR.INDS.MATCH-JEMCO	g	0.00	8	17500	2275	.13	.13	-
	.610	.370	ARAB FOOD & MED.	g	0.00	2	1750	805	.47	.46	.01-
	.470	.240	ARAB INTL.INV.TRD.	46.1	0.00	11	13700	5572	.42	.40	.02-
	.750	.360	NATL.MULT.ENG.NAMICO	g	0.00	2	3000	1139	.38	.30	-
	.690	.580	MIDEAST PHARM. 90%	E	0.00	1	50	26	.62	.61	.01-
	1.650	.860	UNION TOBACCO 75%	g	0.00	4	11066	15249	1.61	1.61	-
	.730	.550	RAZI PHARM.	E	0.00	2	1000	680	.67	.68	.01+
	.460	.240	INDS. ENG.	g	0.00	7	4900	1422	.29	.30	.01+
	.830	.490	INDS. CERAMIC	13.1	0.00	3	476	234	.50	.50	-
N	.950	.550	ADVANCED PHARMA.IND.	g	0.00	16	15201	9630	.63	.62	-
	.740	.430	NATL. POULTRY	g	0.00	43	55950	30232	.53	.55	.02+
N	.950	.470	OPTICALS HEARING 75%	E	0.00	1	500	175	.59	.60	.01+
N	1.310	1.000	NUTRIDAR	P	0.00	1	200	216	1.10	1.08	.02-
N	1.000	.750	EKBAL PRINT CO. 75%	12.6	9.12	2	1250	715	.83	.83	-
	GRAND TOTAL					160	352570	225618			

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY 20/04/1998

	PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
	350.000	251.000	ARAB BANK	14.1	1.16	10	1140	392160	344.00	344.00	-
	2.340	1.660	JOR.NATIONAL BK.	E	0.00	25	12560	22844	1.80	1.80	-
6	3.540	1.250	BANK OF JORDAN	4.2	0.00	1	100	134	1.30	1.34	.04+
S	2.680	1.650	INDUSTRIAL DEV.BK.	9.2	7.88	6	1620	2914	1.79	1.79	-
I	5.710	4.660	THE HOUSING BK.	19.0	2.34	80	57163	240334	5.70	5.99	.29+
S	4.180	1.790	JOR.KUWAIT BANK	.9	0.00	5	690	1266	1.85	1.84	.01-
	.920	.590	JOR.GULF BANK	4.0	10.29	6	12500	8500	.68	.68	-
+S	4.190	2.650	ARAB JOR.INV.BK.	29.6	2.56	1	10000	26000	2.65	2.60	.05-
S	4.020	1.750	JOR.ISLAMIC BANK	15.3	0.00	7	1625	2959	1.83	1.81	.02-
N	2.350	1.610	JOR.INV.FIN.BANK/NEW	E	0.00	2	450	729	1.62	1.62	-
	1.400	.800	BEIT.AL-MAL (BEITNA)	.5	17.65	2	500	425	.86	.85	.01-
	BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 243.56	%CHG: +0.71	145	98358	798265			
S	1.350	.900	ARABIAN SEAS INSUR.	9.5	0.00	1	100	104	1.10	1.04	.06-
	2.400	1.590	JOR FRENCH INSUR.	6.1	11.26	3	12500	27700	2.20	2.20	-
	INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 122.75	%CHG: -0.26	4	12600	27804			
	2.240	1.550	JOR.ELECTRIC PWR.	10.7	5.02	9	2576	5640	2.19	2.19	-
	4.030	1.220	IRBID ELECTRICITY	12.9	4.44	1	350	788	2.35	2.25	.10-
	1.550	.960	NATL. PORTFOLIO	43.1	0.00	8	2200	2366	1.07	1.08	.01+
	4.600	2.890	ARAB INTL.INV.EDUC.	10.4	1.90	1	100	420	4.20	4.20	-
	1.820	1.450	UNIFIED CO.	7.0	6.96	23	10700	17095	1.60	1.58	.02-
	1.350	.950	UNITED FOR FINAN.INV	.7	11.02	9	60000	66200	1.11	1.11	-
	SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 119.10	%CHG: -0.03	51	75926	92608			
	4.450	2.690	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	17.2	3.77	21	16667	48479	2.88	2.92	.04+
	4.140	2.050	JOR.PHOSPHATE MINES	32.2	0.00	3	1400	4270	3.05	3.05	-
	11.160	9.200	JOR. PETROL.REFINARY	10.6	8.12	30	12631	138510	10.90	10.95	.05+
	1.460	1.040	WOOLEN INDUSTRIES	12.4	6.99	3	500	720	1.42	1.43	.01+
i	2.200	1.100	INDUSTRIAL COMM.AGR.	g	0.00	2	200	226	1.16	1.18	.02+
	5.700	3.440	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	15.5	3.57	140	158804	900200	5.55	5.61	.06+
	1.530	1.020	JOR.PIPES MANFCT.	11.0	7.52	7	4350	5802	1.34	1.33	.01-
	6.350	4.400	DAR ALDAWA DV.INV.	7.4	5.72	12	3220	19772	6.05	6.12	.07+
	.570	.400	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	16.6	0.00	9	18500	9065	.49	.49	-
	1.110	.670	ARAB PAPER CONV.TRD.	22.6	0.00	7	9900	7197	.72	.74	.02+
	.620	.510	NATIONAL INDS.	g	0.00	9	6450	3736	.57	.58	.01+
	.780	.270	INTERMED.PETRO.CHEM.	g	0.00	18	24850	9940	.40	.40	-
S	3.000	.920	NATL.CABLE WIRE.MFAC	28.9	0.00	40	40950	48747	1.16	1.20	.04+
	.790	.520	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM	g	0.00	42	55100	23992	.60	.62	.02+
	1.560	1.150	ARAB PHARM.CHEM.	15.1	4.28	28	14100	19436	1.34	1.37	.02+
	1.060	.470	KAWTHER INVEST.	51.2	0.00	1	150	70	.50	.52	.02+
S	1.540	.810	UNIV. MODN.INDS.	14.4	6.67	10	4770	4288	.90	.90	-
	1.210	.680	JOR.INDS.RESOURCES	9.4	14.29	13	11200	7810	.69	.70	.01+
	1.620	1.250	NATL. CHLORINE	10.2	6.80	7	2550	3749	1.47	1.47	-
	1.080	.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	14.4	9.80	30	30250	30920	1.02	1.02	-
	1.790	1.290	EL -ZAY READY WEAR	48.9	0.00	3	1500	2081	1.40	1.39	.01-
	1.250	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.8	0.00	19	8450	10425	1.22	1.24	.02+
	1.220	.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	10.5	0.00	9	4150	4358	1.04	1.05	.01+
	.860	.660	JORDAN STEEL	9.3	8.43	16	16100	13362	.82	.83	.01+
	.790	.570	MID.EAST COMPLEX	7.1	17.24	58	183850	108505	.59	.58	.01-
	INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 109.71	%CHG: +0.41	537	630592	1425779			
	GRAND TOTAL			INDEX: 171.11	%CHG: +0.56	737	817476	2354455			

PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY 20/04/1998

	HIGH	LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
N	1.230	1.050	ISLAMIC INSURANCE CO	P	0.00	2	2000	2310	1.15	1.15	-
	.530	.340	JOR.TRADE FAC.	g	0.00	7	14150	5802	.41	.41	-
	.800	.660	UNION INV. 50%	g	0.00	15	54180	14086	.75	.76	.01+
	.620	.360	ARAB FIN.INVEST.	g	0.00	23	81250	32450	.41	.40	.01-
	1.000	.720	AL-SHARQ INV.CO.	P	0.00	4	20036	20036	1.00	1.00	-
	.290	.120	JOR.INDS.MATCH-JEMCO	g	0.00	5	15000	1950	.13	.13	-
	.470	.240	ARAB INTL.INV.TRD.	43.8	0.00	37	90150	34384	.40	.38	.02-
	.520	.280	NATL. TEXTILE	P	0.00	1	600	198	.35	.33	.02-
	.750	.360	NATL.MULT.ENG.NAMICO	g	0.00	18	28767	10644	.20	.37	.01-
	.690	.580	MIDEAST PHARM. 90%	E	0.00	2	3000	1560	.61	.62	.01+
	1.650	.860	UNION TOBACCO 75%	g	0.00	8	29272	40521	1.61	1.64	.03+
	.730	.550	RAZI PHARM.	E	0.00	2	6750	4590	.68	.68	-
	.460	.240	INDS. ENG.	g	0.00	1	1000	290	.30	.29	.01-
	.830	.490	INDS. CERAMIC	13.1	0.00	2	1500	750	.50	.50	-
N	.950	.550	ADVANCED PHARMA.IND.	g	0.00	1	500	310	.63	.62	.01-
	.740	.430	NATL. POULTRY	g	0.00	58	304800	165459	.55	.55	-
N	.950	.470	OPTICALS HEARING 75%	E	0.00	1	1000	350	.60	.60	-
N	1.310	1.000	NUTRIDAR	P	0.00	1	2000	2120	1.08	1.06	.02-
N	1.000	.750	EKBAL PRINT CO. 75%	12.5	9.24	4	10000	5700	.83	.82	.01-
	GRAND TOTAL					[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]			

IMF asks for study on effects of euro

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The International Monetary Fund's policy-making interim committee Thursday asked its executive board to study the impact of a single European currency on fuod operations.

"The committee requested the Executive Board to examine further the implications of EMU for fund operations and for the conduct of fund surveillance, and to report its findings in time for the next meeting of the commitee," it said in a statement.

The IMF interim committee will meet again in six months' time.

A European Central Bank is to come into being by July 1 at the latest.

From January 1, it will replace central banks in countries that qualify for membership of the single European currency with regard to management of monetary policy and setting interest rates.

Bankers express concern about stocks surge

BASEL, Switzerland (AFP) — Central bank governors from the Group of Ten (G-10) countries have issued a warning about the boom on stock markets and said that the financial crisis in Asia had had little effect on growth of the world economy.

The president of the German Bundesbank, Hans Tietmeyer, said after a meeting of the governors at the headquarters of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) that the trend on stock markets "has to be observed very carefully."

The U.S. market has risen strongly for several years and markets in Europe have risen by 20-30 per cent so far this year.

Regarding the effects of the crisis in Asia, the governors reported that the U.S. economy continued to progress in a relatively positive direction but said they hoped decisions would be taken soon to boost the Japanese economy.

"It seems to be necessary to create new confidence and new expectations for new growth," Mr. Tietmeyer said.

In Europe "growth is improving in most of the countries, but some countries are ahead in the cycle and in fighting unemployment."

Mr. Tietmeyer said that the governors "are not drawing any conclusions yet" but that "we will continue to observe and will discuss this point further" in the next few weeks.

He declined to say whether or not the governors were worried by the price boom and did not indicate which aspects of the rise the governors wanted to study in particular.

The governors had also discussed developments on bond markets, and notably a continuing decline of long-term yields, Mr. Tietmeyer said as president of the committee of G10 governors.

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Sonics, Lakers and Nets finish with flourish

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — The Seattle SuperSonics and Los Angeles Lakers made statements as they enter the National Basketball Association playoffs while the New Jersey Nets were just happy to get there.

The Sonics won the Pacific Division title Sunday while the Lakers won for the third time in four games against NBA regular-season champion Utah and the Nets took the last playoff berth on the final day of the NBA regular season.

Chicago's Michael Jordan won his record 10th NBA scoring title with 28.7 points a game and will lead the Bulls into a playoff quest for their sixth title in eight years starting Friday at home against the Nets.

Seattle's Gary Payton scored 27 points and the Sonics won 90-82 at Portland to claim their third consecutive Pacific division title. They held a tie-breaker edge on the Lakers after both finished 61-21.

The Sonics open the playoffs against Minnesota at home starting Friday, the same day the Lakers begin their first-round series against Portland.

Utah play Houston and San Antonio meet Phoenix in the other Western playoff opening-round best-of-five matchups.

The Lakers beat Utah 102-98 on Sunday, serving notice they will be a threat to Utah and Seattle in the Western Conference playoffs.

With Utah and Chicago owning the NBA's top records, this is the first year the NBA has produced four clubs with 60 triumphs.

Shaquille O'Neal scored 33 points to lead the Lakers past Utah but was 26 points shy of overtaking Jordan for the NBA scoring title.

"Individual honors don't mean much to me any more," O'Neal said. "I'm more concerned with how the team does. Michael is a great player. I'm just proud to have my name up there next to his."

Laker executive Jerry West, whose tenure as an NBA decision-maker is the league's second-longest, said the job's stress is becoming too much for him but he will make a decision about retirement after this season.

The Nets claimed the final vacant playoff berth, beating Detroit 114-101 at home for their first post-season trip in four years.

Kendall Gill scored a season-high 27 points for the Nets, who lost three in a row but held off Washington for the last Eastern Conference playoff spot, booking a first-round date with the Chicago Bulls.

The Nets won despite injuries to center Jayson Williams and guard Sam Cassell. Keith Van Horn scored 25 points and Kerry Kittles added 22 as New Jersey sealed a 10th playoff bid in 22 NBA seasons.

The Bulls won all four games with the Nets this season. The series opens Friday in Chicago.

Other first-round Eastern playoff matchups pit New York against Miami, Indiana against Cleveland and Atlanta against Charlotte, which beat Orlando 89-76 to gain a home-court edge in that series.

Shaq doesn't catch Jordan on final day

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Jordan won his 10th scoring title, the most in NBA history, as Shaquille O'Neal came up 26 points shy of overtaking him.

O'Neal, who needed to score 59 points to pass Jordan's average, had 33 Sunday as the Lakers beat the Utah Jazz on the final day of the regular season.

"I've already won a scoring title," said O'Neal, who led the league with a 29.3 average for Orlando in 1994-95 — the year Jordan was finishing his baseball career.

"I want that jewelry. That's all I want," O'Neal said, referring to championship rings.

Jordan finished with an average of 28.7 per game — the lowest league-leading average since Alex English scored 28.4 for the 1982-83 Denver Nuggets. O'Neal finished with an average of 28.3.

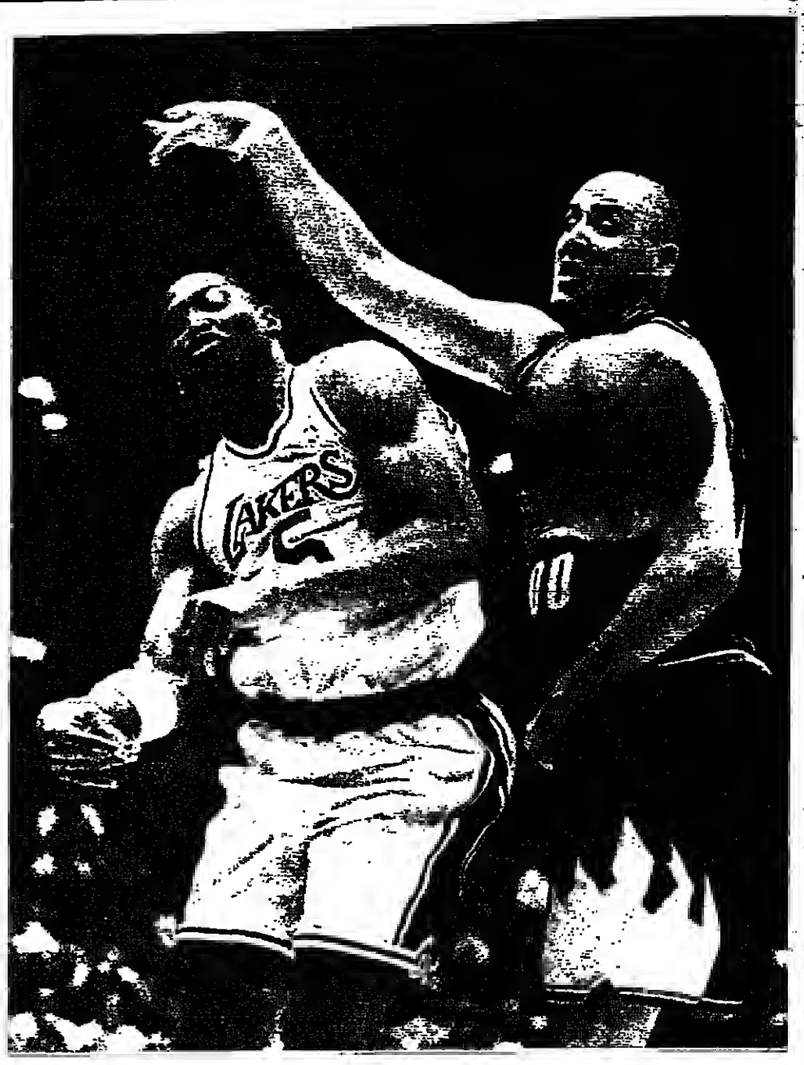
Jordan's Chicago Bulls teammate, Dennis Rodman, won an unprecedented seventh consecutive rebounding title with an average of 15.0.

Rod Strickland of Washington won the assists title by averaging 10.5 per game, the lowest league-leading total since Magic Johnson averaged the same number in 1982-83.

Mookie Blaylock of Atlanta led the league in steals for the second straight season, averaging 2.61 to edge rookie Brevin Knight of Cleveland.

Marcus Camby of Toronto won the blocked shots title with an average of 3.65, not even needing the 10 rejections he had Sunday as he had a triple-double in a loss to the 76ers.

Chris Mullin of Indiana was the most accurate free throw shooter (93.9 per cent), O'Neal was the most accurate from the field (58.6 per cent) and Dale Ellis of Denver won the 3-point accuracy title for the first time in his career by shooting 46.4 per cent from behind the arc.



Los Angeles Lakers Robert Horry (L) passes the ball around Utah Jazz' Greg Ostertag, during first period of their NBA game in Inglewood, Ca. The Lakers beat the Jazz, 102-98 (Reuters photo)

Bulls' challenge: Another championship

CHICAGO (AP) — Are they too old for another championship? Too beaten up by a regular season in which they were still among the NBA's elite but no longer the dominant team? Winning another title in what might be their final run could be the toughest assignment yet for the Chicago Bulls. Their quest for a sixth crown in the '90s begins this week.

"We're just happy the regular season is over," Bulls coach Phil Jackson said.

"We think there is a certain amount of energy loss at the end of the season. Some of the guys looked like they were at the age we've been talking about the whole year. But we made it through the season, I think, in great form." The Bulls went on a late 13-game winning streak to secure homecourt advantage in the East but then wearily dropped three of four to lose the homecourt should they make the finals against Utah. They struggled to win their final two games against Philadelphia and New York to finish the season 62-20.

"Going into the end of the season, it's tough mentally to go out there and push yourself for a purpose. You know it's the end of the season and you're going to start a whole new one," Michael Jordan said.

"Now you're going to take time away for a week, go through practices, dissect your opponent and focus on the ultimate goal of winning a championship." Jordan scored 44 points Saturday night in the regular-season finale against the Knicks, with 22-of-24 free throws. He was 11-of-24 from the field, making him 34-of-87 in the final four games of the season.

The Bulls will host New Jersey in the first round with Games 1 and 2 on Friday and Sunday. They swept Washington out of the opening round a year ago.

"We have to worry about ourselves. We shouldn't worry about the other team," Jordan said.

"If we play our game, we can beat anybody in this league. It doesn't matter who we play. I just like to prepare to play the best basketball we can play." The Bulls must release their playoff roster Monday, when they will also determine when center Luc Longley might be ready to play. Longley missed 11 games, including the final five, with a bone bruise on his left knee.

The future for Jackson and Jordan is still unclear as they enter the postseason. Jackson says the playoffs will be the Bulls' "last dance." "I'm going to enjoy the moment," promised Jordan, whose playoff scoring average is 33.6, highest in NBA history.

"The next moment is not promised to you. It may well be the last dance. You should treat it as that, so you can perform at the level you want to, not knowing."

Michael Jordan

NBA regular season final standings

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Miami	55	27	.671	—
y-New York	43	39	.524	12
y-New Jersey	43	39	.524	12
Washington	42	40	.512	13
Orlando	41	41	.500	14
Boston	36	46	.439	19
Philadelphia	31	51	.378	24

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Chicago	62	20	.756	—
y-Indiana	58	24	.707	4
y-Charlotte	51	31	.622	11
y-Atlanta	50	32	.610	12
y-Cleveland	47	35	.573	15
Detroit	37	45	.451	25
Milwaukee	36	46	.439	26
Toronto	16	66	.195	46

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Midwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Utah	62	20	.756	—
y-San Antonio	56	26	.683	6
y-Minnesota	45	37	.549	17
y-Houston	41	41	.500	21
Dallas	20	62	.244	42
Vancouver	19	63	.232	43
Denver	11	71	.134	51

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Seattle	61	21	.744	—
y-L.A. Lakers	61	21	.744	—
y-Phoenix	56	26	.683	5
y-Portland	46	36	.561	15
Sacramento	27	55	.329	34
Golden State	19	63	.232	42
L.A. Clippers	17	65	.207	44

x-clinched division title
y-clinched playoff spot
z-clinched conference title

Afghanistan to play first international in 3 years

KABUL (AFP) — Afghanistan's Taliban-run sports body on Monday announced it has secured a series of international games for the national football squad in Saudi Arabia next month.

The series would be the first international matches played by an Afghan national team in three years.

The Islamic militia-appointed head of the national Olympic committee told reporters that a soon to be selected soccer team will play a series of friendly matches against Saudi Arabia in May.

"We have started inviting teams from all over Afghanistan to select a team," Mullah Abdul Shukur Motmain announced, adding that only teams from Taliban-held parts of Afghanistan would attend the selection.

He also said an Afghan side had been invited to the Asia cup in Thailand in December, which a selected team tested in Saudi Arabia hoped to compete in.

Afghanistan's last international tour was in Iran in 1995 when the team played against a side in the northwest of the country, drawing 2-2.

Baggio keeps hoping

MILAN (AFP) — Roberto Baggio is living in hope that the more goals he scores, the closer he will get to the World Cup finals.

The Italian idol, sidelined yet again by Cesare Maldini for this week's friendly against Paraguay, scored twice as Bologna beat his former club AC Milan at home for the first the time in 24 years on Sunday.

An opportunist goal from close range and a penalty — he has converted nine out of nine spot-kicks this season, despite being remembered for his miss against Brazil in the 1994 final — brought his tally to 16.

"I'd like to score 20 this season, even though I'm not setting any limits to providence," he said. "I don't know if these goals will be enough to convince the coach to call me up for the World Cup squad, but I'll keep trying."

Baggio was watched by one of Maldini's aides in Sunday's 3-0 win, but he is still waiting to follow-up last year's welcome return to the national squad with a goalscoring performance against Poland.

It remains his only objective in the weeks ahead, and was one of the reasons why he swapped AC Milan for Bologna last summer — believing he had a better chance of making France '98 by playing regularly for a smaller club than watching from the Milan susbstitutes' bench.

His former coach Fabio Capello said on Sunday that Baggio was back to the level when he played for Milan.

But Baggio retorted: "Milan never gave me the chance to show what I was worth... and I'm delighted to be here and to have made the right choice.

"I've improved since last year, and partly because I used to have to spend my Sundays on the bench."

The goals, along with the support of the press and public opinion and a disappointing season for Chelsea's Gianfranco Zola, are all on Baggio's side: but time is beginning to run out for the striker. Maldini will announce his squad of 22 on June 2, immediately after their friendly against Sweden in Stockholm and just a few days before leaving for the extravaganza in France.

Rangers slump to costly loss

GLASGOW (AFP) — Aberdeen dealt Rangers' hopes of a 10th straight Scottish Premiership title a major blow when they beat the defending champions 1-0 at Pittodrie on Sunday.

Italian defender Lorenzo Amoruso was red-carded as Rangers' were shattered by Stephen Glass' 28th-minute winner that left the defending champions three points behind leaders Celtic with three rounds remaining. Needing victory to keep pace with Celtic, Rangers lost their heads after the break in a stormy encounter.

Glass' deft 28th minute header was deserved reward for the Dons' fluent display but the match turned ugly in the second half.

Amoruso was given his marching orders for apparently raising an arm in a melee of players in the home team's penalty area after 59 minutes.

The award of a free-kick for John Inglis' innocuous trip on Gordon Durie initially sparked a booking for Scotland 'keeper Jim Leighton for kicking the ball away. Stuart McCall, substituted minutes earlier, ran back on to retrieve the ball — against the rules — and having already been booked he could earn further disciplinary points.

His cause was not helped by an angry exchange with fourth official John Rowbotham on the touchline and he was fortunate not to be sent off. Amoruso's red card bemused supporters on both sides, but television pictures indicated the raising of an arm to an unspecified member of the grouped Aberdeen backline.

It was only Amoruso's second start for Rangers since his 3.9 million pound move from Fiorentina after injury sidelined him for 10 months. That bizarre sequence of events on the hour almost overshadowed the significance of a scoreline which lifted struggling Aberdeen to sixth.

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Sports

Barcelona champions as Juventus and Inter win

PARIS (AFP) — Juventus stayed one point clear at the top of Italy's Serie A on Sunday after edging Empoli 1-0 as title rivals Inter Milan ran out 2-0 winners against Udinese.

Juventus' hero was substitute Fabio Pecchia, who had only been on a few minutes for French midfielder Zinedine Zidane when he guided the ball past Empoli's keeper in the 70th minute.

Juventus' villain was Alessio Tacchinardi, who was sent off a quarter of an hour from the end for elbowing and nearly jeopardised their bid for a second consecutive league title.

Inter were meanwhile saved by two late goals in the last 10 minutes from France's Youri Djorkaeff and Ronaldo after being made to suffer at San Siro by Udinese's Oliver Bierhoff. Vicenza bounced back from Thursday night's defeat to Chelsea, which cost them a place in the European Cup Winners Cup final, by beating third-placed Lazio 2-1.

Vicenza playmaker Liamberto Zauli opened the scoring in the 27th minute, and Lazio's Roberto Mancini striked a 20-yard shot between post and crossbar on the restart. But Vicenza kept up the pressure and were almost immediately rewarded with a 54th minute winner from Espinoza Luisco.

Marseille crashed to a surprise defeat on Saturday night, leaving Lens and Lyon as the only teams who can win the French League championship and both sides of European Champions League places next season. Auxerre beat Marseille 2-1, while defending champions and European Cup semi-finalists Monaco crashed 1-0 at home to lowly Toulouse in front of

NBA
New Jersey 114
Philadelphia 107
Atlanta 101
Charlotte 89
LA Lakers 102
Seattle 90
Phoenix 123
San Antonio 96
Vancouver 112

American League
Boston 2
Detroit 3
Toronto 5
Seattle 7
Texas 11
Tampa Bay 6
Kansas City 7

National League
NY Mets 14
Milwaukee 3
St Louis 3
Chicago Cubs 3
Montreal 5
Atlanta 5
Colorado 10
Florida 4
San Diego at Pittsburgh, Postponed

Spanish championship
Athletic Bilbao 2
Majorca 2
Real Valladolid 0
D La Coruna 1
R Santander 2
Tenerife 3
Real Madrid 5

Portuguese championship
Rio Ave 3
Sporting Braga 2
Farense 1
D.o Chaves 2
Beseiro 3
Salgueiros 1

Italian football
Atalanta
Bologna 1
Napoli 3
Inter Milan 0
Lecce 2
Napoli 0
Piacenza 0
AS Roma 0
Vicenza 5
2

English Premiership
Chelsea 1
Coventry 1

Detroit
Toronto
Miami
Orlando
Utah
Portland
Houston
Denver
Sacramento

Cleveland
NY Yankees
White Sox
Minnesota
Baltimore
Anaheim
Oakland

Cincinnati
San Francisco
Philadelphia
Los Angeles
Houston
Colorado
Atlanta
Arizona

Compostela
Espanyol
Celta Vigo
Salamanca
Merida
Real Betis
Real Oviedo

A. Coimbra
Campomaiorense
Leça
Estrela Amadora
M. Funchal
Belenenses

Fiorentina
AC Milan
Juventus
Udinese
Parma
Sampdoria
Bari
Brescia
Lazio

Sheff Wed
Liverpool

Barcelona champions as Juventus and Inter win

Barcelona's Brazilian stars Giovanni, Anderson and Rivaldo wear T-shirts forming the word "Champions" flanked by Portuguese players Luis Figo (L) and Victor Baia (R) as they salute a cheering crowd atop an open bus to celebrate their 15th Spanish league title April 19. Barcelona secured the Spanish soccer championship with four games left to play after beating Real Zaragoza 1-0 at home (Reuters photo)

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Marseille crashed to a surprise defeat on Saturday night, leaving Lens and Metz as the only teams who can win the French League championship and both assured of European Champions League places next season. Auxerre beat Marseille 2-1, while defending champions and European Cup semi-finalists Monaco crashed 1-0 at home to lowly Toulouse in front of just 3,000 spectators in another shock. Lens lead the league with 64 point with Metz on 62 and Marseille trailing on 55 with two rounds of matches remaining.

Sabri Lamouchi and prolific Stephane Guivarc'h scored Auxerre's goals as they downed Marseille, whose goal came from Italian international Fabrizio Ravanelli. A 34th-minute header from Laurent Battles sunk Monaco at home and boosted Toulouse's hopes of avoiding the drop.

Paris St Germain are seeking a French Cup and French League Cup double, but their league form continued to be dismal. They lost 1-0 at home to Bordeaux and failed in their bid for their 400th league win. Sylvain Wiltord scored the only goal in the 40th minute.

Le Havre assured their survival with a 1-0 win away to Strasbourg, with Cyrille Pouget their marksman after 67 minutes.

In other games Saturday night, Bastia beat Montpellier 2-1, Lyon kept alive their UEFA Cup hopes with a 3-2 win over relagtion candidates Chateauroux and Guingamp won 2-1 at Rennes in battle between two sides fighting to avoid the drop. Kaiserslautern drew 2-2 away to Hansa Rostock on Saturday to hold on to their one-point lead in the Bundesliga.

A 69th-minute own goal by Rostock's Thomas Gansauge gave Kaiserslautern the draw, while their closest pursuers Bayern Munich drew 4-4 away to bottom-placed Arminia Bielefeld. An 87th-minute goal by veteran Lothar Matthaus kept Bayern in the title race, although they only have three matches to play while Kaiserslautern have four. Four days after booking their place in the Cup Winners' Cup against English Premier League side Chelsea, Stuttgart beat VfL Bochum 2-0 in the only Sunday game. The win boosted Stuttgart two places to fourth and left VfL Bochum struggling in 15th, level on 34 points with Karlsruhe who occupy the first of three relegation spots. German international Fredi Bobic, who scored the winner against Lokomotive Moscow last week, opened his side's account in the 20th minute.

Krassimir Balakow put the result beyond doubt though when he converted an 89th minute penalty for handball. Brazil's Giovanni earned Barcelona a 1-0 win over Real Zaragoza at the Nou Camp stadium on Saturday which clinched their 15th Spanish league title.

Barcelona had dominated the league in recent weeks but the win made absolutely sure they regained the title Real Madrid won last year.

Barcelona are now 14 points ahead of second-placed Madrid, who thrashed Real Oviedo 5-1 on Sunday, but both teams have only four games left. Real Zaragoza nearly scored twice in a spell just before the break, but Barcelona also had a great chance when a Roger free-kick from well outside the area was palmed over the bar.

But it was all over when Brazil's Giovanni rose at the far post to head home in the 77th minute and seal the title. He also hit an injury time free-kick onto the crossbar.

Then on Sunday, Athletic Bilbao grabbed second place for a while with their 2-0 win over Compostela but Real Madrid regained their second spot in a late fixture. Real Madrid's Fernando Morientes and Raul both hit two goals and Manuel Sanchis bagged the other in their 5-1 win over Oviedo.

Greene and Boldon set tone for 1998 rivalry

WALNUT, California (AFP) — Ato Boldon won the Mt. SAC Relays 100m in 9.86sec here Sunday, claiming the third-fastest time in history and launching a 1998 assault on Donovan Bailey's world record of 9.84.

Boldon, the 200m world champion from Trinidad, said he fully expected Bailey's mark to fall — he and his HSInternational clubmate Maurice Greene of the United States are both gunning for it.

Greene, the 100m gold medallist at the 1997 world championships in Athens, cruised to victory in the 200m here in 20.03sec, the fastest time in the world this year.

Boldon said he and Greene, who train under coach John Smith, have been egging each other on in a bid for the record.

"We've got to get this record under 9.8," said Boldon, adding that he wasn't in the least surprised to run so fast so early in the season.

"I told John (Smith) that if the wind was anywhere around 2.0, there was going to be a world record," he said. And Boldon said there was plenty of room for improvement over the season.

Boldon said technically he was "not even close" to perfect.

"The start was much improved. Unfortunately my legs aren't quite there yet. I got a little wobbly around 80-85 (m).

Greene, 23, said his early-season stab at the 200 was no indication that he would let Boldon have his way in the 100m.

"Me and Ato have a plan," Greene said. "I'm going to break it first, and he's going to break it second, and I'm going to break it a third time and have it at the end of the year."

Asked if he was sure Boldon saw it quite the same way, Greene laughed.

"That's my plan — I don't know what his plan is!"

The HSInternational squad was set to head for the Penn Relays next weekend, but an injury to 4 x 100m leadoff man Jon Drummond may prompt them to cancel that trip.

Drummond went down just strides into the race, apparently suffering from some kind of back injury.

France's double Olympic gold medallist Marie-Jose Perec, who also trains with Smith, was a no-show. Originally entered in the 100m and 200m, she decided not to run because she caught a cold flying back to California after a promotional trip to France earlier in the week, Smith said.

American John Godina, shot put gold medallist last year at the world championships in Athens, completed the best weight-throw double in history with victories in both the shot and discus.

Godina won the shot with a throw of 21.78m, and he captured the discus with a throw of 66.47. Both are the best in the world this year.

Another 1997 world champion, Marion Jones of the United States, turned a training race into a triumph with a victory in the 400m.

Jones, the 100m world champion, clocked 50.36 to win the 400, the United States' 100m world champion, tried her hand at a rare 400m — largely for training purposes she said — and walked away with the second-fastest time in the world this year of 50.36.

France rally to win in Fed Cup; U.S take 3-0 lead

PARIS (AFP) — Rookie Sarah Pitkowski helped defending champions France rally from 1-2 down to beat Belgium 3-2 in their Fed Cup World Group I first-round match in Ghent on Sunday.

Pitkowski downed Sabine Appelmans 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 to pull France level and Nathalie Tauziat and Alexandra Fusai then beat Els Callens and Laurence Courtois 6-4, 6-0 in the decisive doubles.

France's victory was a bitter blow for Dominique Van Roost, who won both her singles for Belgium but got no support from her teammates. French captain Yannick Noah was left relieved that two of his controversial decisions paid off.

In addition to dropping France's top-ranked player Mary Pierce, Noah also selected Pitkowski to play singles ahead of the higher-ranked Nathalie Tauziat. France will now face Switzerland in the semi-finals on July 25-26 after World No.1 Martina Hingis led the Swiss to a 4-1 win over the Czech Republic in Prague.

The teams were level 1-1 after Saturday's opening singles, but the Swiss swept Sunday's matches with Hingis beating Jana Novotna 4-6, 6-3, 6-2, Patty Schnyder downing Adriana Gersi 6-3, 6-3 and Hingis and Schnyder then defeating Denisa Chladkova and Ludmila Richterova 6-0, 6-1 in the doubles.

Magui Serna, a 19-year-old replacement for the injured Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, led Spain to a stunning 3-2 win over Germany in Saarbrucken and the Spaniards will face the United States in the other semi.

Serna won her final singles and then teamed with Conchita Martinez to win the doubles as Spain came back from 1-2 down after former Wimbledon champion Martinez lost both of her singles. Serna beat Jana Kandarr 6-3, 6-4 and then joined Martinez to defeat Wiltrud Probst and Andrea Glass 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) in the decisive doubles.

The Americans took a winning 3-0 lead over the injury-depleted Netherlands at Kiawah Island, South Carolina, when Lindsay Davenport beat Miriam Oremans 6-1, 6-2. The Americans avenged their surprise 3-2 opening-round loss to the Dutch a year ago.

That defeat came in Europe as the Americans were trying to defend their record 15th Fed Cup crown. Davenport, not chosen for last year's loss to the Dutch, rose to 21-2 lifetime in Fed Cup play. Russia surprised Australia 3-2 in a World Group II match in Perth and they were joined in the final four by Italy, who beat Austria, and Slovakia, who won away to Argentina.

The Croatia-Japan match will be played in Dubrovnik next weekend.

SCOREBOARD

NBA			
New Jersey	114	Detroit	101
Philadelphia	107	Toronto	78
Atlanta	101	Miami	89
Charlotte	89	Orlando	76
LA Lakers	102	Utah	98
Seattle	90	Portland	82
Phoenix	123	Houston	93
San Antonio	96	Denver	82
Vancouver	112	Sacramento	108 (OT)
American League			
Boston	2	Cleveland	0
Detroit	2	NY Yankees	1
Toronto	5	White Sox	4
Seattle	7	Minnesota	4
Texas	11	Baltimore	7
Tampa Bay	6	Anaheim	0
Kansas City	7	Oakland	3
National League			
NY Mets	14	Cincinnati	0
Milwaukee	3	San Francisco	2
St Louis	3	Philadelphia	2
Chicago Cubs	2	Los Angeles	1
Montreal	5	Houston	4
Atlanta	5	Colorado	3
Colorado	10	Atlanta	7
Florida	4	Arizona	3
San Diego at Pittsburgh		Postponed	
Spanish championship			
Athletic Bilbao	2	Compostela	0
Majorca	2	Espanyol	2
Real Valladolid	0	Celta Vigo	0
D. La Coruna	1	Salamanca	0
R. Santander	2	Merida	0
Tenerife	3	Real Betis	1
Real Madrid	5	Real Oviedo	1
Portuguese championship			
Rio Ave	3	A. Coimbra	0
Sporting Braga	2	Campomaiorense	1
Farense	1	Leca	1
Oro Chaves	2	Estrela Amadora	0
Beira-Mar	3	M. Funchal	1
Salgueiros	1	Belenenses	1
Italian football			
Udinese	1	Fiorentina	0
Bologna	3	AC Milan	0
Empoli	0	Juventus	1
Inter Milan	2	Udinese	0
Lazio	0	Parma	2
Napoli	0	Sampdoria	2
Perugia	0	Bari	1
AS Roma	5	Brescia	0
Vicenza	2	Lazio	1
English Premiership			
Chelsea	1	Sheff Wed	0
Coventry	1	Liverpool	1

Scottish Premiership			
Aberdeen	1	Rangers	0
Belgian League			
Antwerp	3	Standard Liege	5
Harelbeke	0	Charleroi	0
Lommel	2	Aalst	2
FC Brugge	1	Ekeren	3
German first division			
VfB Stuttgart	2	Bocbum	0
Dutch League			
FC Groningen	2	Ajax Amsterdam	4
Breda	1	Feyenoord	3
FC Utrecht	0	Doetinchem	0

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Serie A strikes blow for children

MILAN (AFP) — Childreo's rights leaders were celebrating a victory in Italian soccer on Monday, after a successful campaign against the exploitatioo of child labour in the manufacture of footballs.

Balls were handed out by children wearing specially-made T-shirts to all the captains of Serie A and B teams before kick-off at the weekend, as part of a UNICEF-sponsored initiative.

The balls had beeo sewn together using adult-only labour in Pakistan, a leader in worldwide production, while the Italian T-shirts bore the slogan "I didn't sew this."

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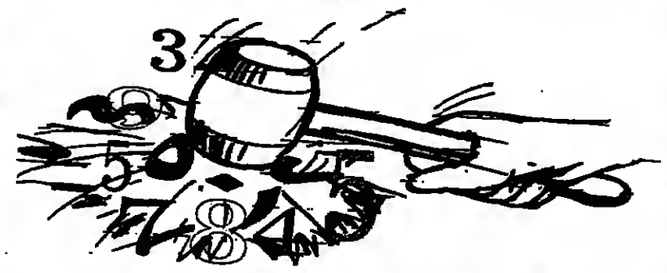
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To resolve PoW issue:

Iran, Iraq open border talks

BAGHDAD (AP) — Ten years after a conflict that left more than a million dead or wounded, Iraq and Iran hope to bridge differences with talks on freeing their remaining prisoners of war (PoWs).

The former adversaries began discussing a final exchange of prisoners at a meeting Monday at an Iraqi border post. An Iranian diplomat in Baghdad described the discussions as "very positive and encouraging" and said they could help resolve humanitarian issues still remaining from the 1980-88 war.

The Iranian side, he said, was headed by Abdullah Najafi, chairman of the commission for PoWs. The Iraqi delegation was led by Riyad Al Qaisi, a deputy foreign minister.

The meeting at the border post of Mundhariya, 120 kilometres east of Baghdad, follows the recent release of more than 5,000 Iraqis and some 300 Iranians, the largest prisoner swap between the neighbours since 1990. It could lead to freedom for many more prisoners, some jailed for up to 18 years. The thaw in the countries' stormy relations began when Iraq's state-run media halted its bitter attacks on Iran after Iranian President Mohammad Khatami took office in August. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein vowed to respond to any step by Iran to normalise ties.

Now, even visits by junior Iranian officials are highlighted by Iraq's official press, and the country's most influential newspaper — Babel, owned by President Hussein's eldest son, Uday — has repeatedly called for an alliance between Iraq, Iran and Syria. Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed Al Sahhaf has visited Iran twice since Mr. Khatami took over. His talks in the capital Tehran led to the huge prisoner swap early this month.

Under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Iran handed over 5,584 Iraqi POWs in return for three Iranian prisoners and 316 so-called civil law detainees, those that Iraq says were arrested after the conflict.

Iran has so far released more than 56,000 Iraqi PoWs. More than 10,000 Iraqis are still in captivity in Iran, according to Iraqi officials.

Iraq maintains it is not holding any Iranian POWs. But the Iranian diplomat said Mr. Najafi presented documents to Al Qaisi about Iranians it believes are in Iraqi jails. He did not give a figure.

The diplomat, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition his name not be used, said Iran hoped to get a "final answer on its PoWs" from the Iraqis.

He said Tehran would do its best to resolve the PoW issue "once and for all."

Discussions between the former adversaries on exchanging tourists also are under way, the diplomat said. He said that just "minor technical details" stood in the way of Iranian pilgrims visiting holy shrines in Iraq.

VISITING WITH REFUGEES: His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan sitting on the floor with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and a Palestinian refugee family in the Baqaa Camp, 27 kilometres north of Amman on Sunday (See story on page 1) (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Arabs boycott EU meeting on Iraq's oil-for-food deal

LONDON (AP) — With Iraq and most of the Arab World boycotting it, a European Union conference opened Monday aimed at speeding up ways of implementing a U.N. oil-for-food programme.

"The problem is how to help the people without helping the regime," EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs Emma Bonino said.

Britain, current president of the 15-nation EU, decided to hold the conference after U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan averted looming war by getting Iraq to sign a Feb. 23 agreement on weapons inspections.

Since 1996, the United Nations has eased sanctions to allow Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to export limited amounts of oil to buy food and medicines. In June, the United Nations raised the oil sales ceiling from $ 2.14 billion to $5.26 billion every six months.

In Cairo, newspapers on Monday quoted Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa as saying Egypt was not invited to the London conference and that "Arab and Gulf countries turned down invitations."

Britain, which like the United States is a prominent advocate of sanctions, took a lead in expanding the oil-for-food programme — derided by Iraq as an attempt to alleviate Western consciences about the suffering of ordinary Iraqis.

British officials acknowledged that the Iraq Humanitarian Conference faced big problems.

"We must find ways to make our programmes more effective, despite the lack of cooperation from the government of Iraq," International Development Secretary Clare Short said. "There are no easy answers, but we must do everything we can."

Attending the conference at Lancaster House, a government meeting centre, were U.N. representatives, officials from the 15 EU nations, and delegates from charities and other aid organisations.

"I hope that a good brainstorming session will produce practical ideas... and make a real difference to the lives of the Iraqi people," British Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett said.

The British and U.S. governments accuse President Hussein of foot-dragging over purchases of food and medical supplies for Iraq's 22 million people, while spending lavishly on himself and his retinue.

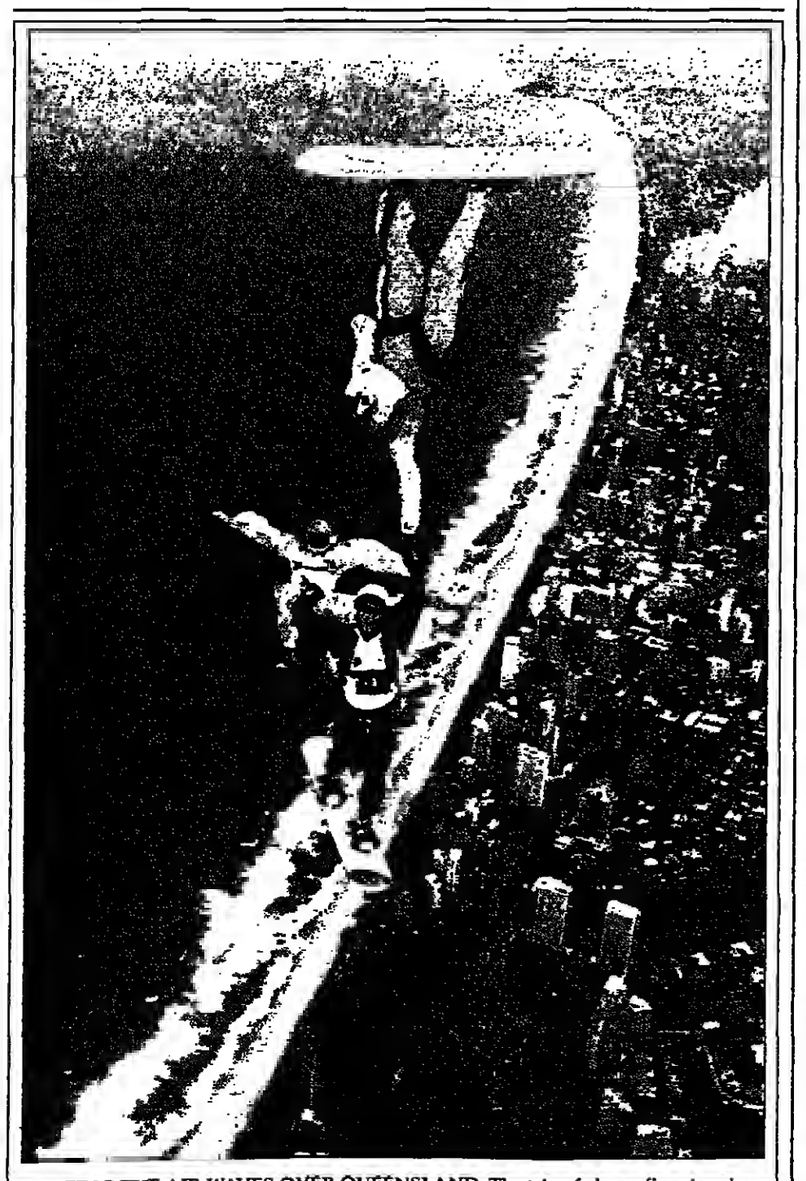
Last week, a team of Dutch experts working for the United Nations said Iraq's petroleum industry is in such bad shape that it will not be able to export its six-month quotas. The team said Iraq may not even meet the $4 billion it says it can manage every six months.

The main condition of lifting sanctions, imposed after President Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, is U.N.-verified inspections of suspected sites for producing weapons of mass destruction.

Last week, in what critics labelled a propaganda move, a left-wing British Labour Party lawmaker brought a 4-year-old Iraqi girl suffering from leukaemia to Britain.

Lawmaker George Galloway said the child was one of thousands dying because of lack of medicines, and that the London meeting was a belated recognition of the widespread suffering in Iraq.

"Those of us who have been saying it for eight years have been routinely derided as Saddamist stooges," he added in a BBC radio interview.



SURFING THE AIR WAVES OVER QUEENSLAND: The trio of skysurfing daredevils hit the airwaves over Surfers Paradise Beach on the Gold Coast of Queensland on Saturday. The trio are part of the Extreme Games now being held on the coast. From top are Oliver Furrer of Switzerland, Knut Krecker of Germany and Mike Milton of Australia (AP Photo)

Algerian security forces implicated in more than 100 cases of abuse — report

ALGIERS (AP) — Algerian security forces or members of government-armed civilian militias are being investigated in more than 100 cases of abuse, an Algerian daily reported.

The independent Al Watan, citing the justice ministry, reported Sunday that most of the suspects are police officers or members of so-called self-defence groups, which are armed by the government to protect their areas against attack by Islamists.

Different courts are looking into 128 different cases of abuse, including theft, kidnapping, improper use of guns, rape, and murder, the paper said.

Half the cases — 54 — concern suspected murders in public places, such as summary executions in the street, the paper said.

Al Watan noted that 120 police officers are currently being detained at an Algiers prison, Serkadji, for theft, corruption and other abuses. In only seven cases have the suspects been judged and sentenced, it said.

But it quoted unidentified ministry officials as saying most of the crimes were merely "blunders."

"We are far from catastrophe," an official was quoted as saying.

Newspapers recently reported the arrest of two mayors and five civilian militia leaders for at least two killings, and maybe dozens more, in an area where suspected Islamists have carried out brutal massacres. They have since been freed conditionally, and authorities haven't commented on their status.

Algerian suspects given jail sentences in Belgium

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Three suspected Algerian extremists charged with throwing a grenade at Belgian policemen during a hot pursuit in December 1995 were sentenced Monday to prison terms ranging between two and five years, authorities announced.

One of the defendants, however, walked free after the court suspended his three-year sentence, the Belga news agency reported. He was identified as Mohammad Ali Al Majda, a member of Algeria's extremist Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

His brother, Youssef, was sentenced to two years and the third suspect, Kamel Saddeddine, alias Nouredine, was sentenced to five years.

Saddeddine was also suspected of having tried to recruit people for an organisation in charge of collecting funds for the armed Islamist insurgency in Algeria.

An investigation into that network is still underway and could be linked to similar cases in France, Britain and the Netherlands, authorities say.

Yemeni troops encircle kidnappers of British family

SANAA (AFP) — Yemeni troops have surrounded a village where tribesmen have been holding a British Council official and his family since last week, the British embassy said Monday.

The government has "encircled the village with armed troops but are looking for a peaceful solution. We have emphasised that we want a peaceful solution," said David Pearce, the deputy head of mission.

The kidnappers' demands and the condition of the British hostages were unknown, he said.

But security sources said the tribe based in the Dhamar region wanted the government to build a road for their remote villages.

The Sanaa governor, who is also a senior tribal figure, was being sent to the region to help in negotiations for the release of David Mitchell, his wife, Caroline, and their 14-year-old son Ben, Mr. Pearce said.

The governor was instrumental in securing the release of the last British hostage in Yemen, aid worker Henry Thompson, who together with two Yemenis was seized by the same tribe as Mr. Mitchell and held for 15 days in October.

The Beni Dabiyan tribe at the time reportedly wanted financial aid for their region and for the government to complete electricity and water projects. It was not known if the demands were met.

Mr. Mitchell, 48-year-old head teacher at the British Council in Aden, is being held in the Beni Dabiyan tribal region of Dhamar, some 160 kilometres southeast of here, security sources said.

The Britons were seized last Thursday in an ambush on the road from the southern city of Aden as they drove to Sanaa airport for the wife and son to take a flight home after spending two weeks in Yemen over the Easter holidays.

Security sources said the Beni Dabiyan tribe also tried to kidnap a foreigner in Sanaa last week but were foiled by police and fled, leaving behind a car.

More than 100 foreigners, most of them tourists but also diplomats, have been abducted by Yemen's unruly tribesmen since 1993. They have been used as bargaining chips in disputes with the government, but released unharmed.

A Dutch national was the last kidnap victim. The tourist was held for 16 days in February before being released.

In March, however, a German woman was shot and wounded as well as three Yemeni police escorts when gunmen opened fire at a tourist convoy in the eastern region of Maarib.

Somali abductors threaten to kill aid staff if ransom not paid

GENEVA (AFP) — The Somali kidnappers of 10 Red Cross and Red Crescent aid workers have threatened to execute them over 24 hours if they fail to get a $1 million ransom, the international Red Cross said Monday.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) added that it was taking seriously the threat to the lives of nine expatriates and one Somali detained by members of one armed faction in the north of the capital Mogadishu since Wednesday.

Television footage taken by a U.S. news agency on Sunday in Mogadishu included one of the armed guards saying in Somali, "we will execute them if we do not receive $100,000 for each one in the next 24 hours," ICRC spokesman Michael Kleiner said.

Mr. Kleiner said the ICRC took the threat "seriously," although the Geneva-based organisation has received neither any direct or indirect ransom demand, nor any confirmation of the televised ultimatum.

The ICRC did not know the identity of the person who made the threat in front of the camera, he said.

It was not clear when the ultimatum was due to begin and expire, but the film was shown here on Sunday night.

However, in a statement issued here on Monday, both the ICRC and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said they were "extremely worried" about their personnel abducted in divided Mogadishu, where rival warlords hold different fiefs.

The statement said television pictures showed a man threatening an ICRC delegate with his rifle and issuing a ransom demand together with the ultimatum.

"Shocked by this spectacle, the ICRC and the International Federation appeal to all parties concerned not to expose the ten captives to public curiosity."

Mr. Kleiner explained that the broadcasting was a publicity tool for the kidnappers, allowing them to step up the pressure. He added: "The presence of television cameras endangers the lives of our colleagues."

Seven of the foreign hostages work for the ICRC and two for the Federation, while the Somali is employed by the local Red Crescent. Two of the expatriates are Swiss, while the others come from Germany, Belgium, France, Norway, the United States, South Africa and Kenya.

The abductors are members of a sub-clan dominant in north Mogadishu. The hostage-taking has worsened clan feuding and stopped all relief work as well as efforts to establish a joint authority in the city, divided since the 1991 ouster of dictator Mohammad Ziad Barre. The ICRC said it was in constant contact with elders of the clans and with politicians and influential Somalis who are holding talks with the kidnappers.

The Red Cross agencies on Monday called again for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages and urged them to respect the "physical and moral integrity of the ten."

The ICRC, which has a stated principle of never paying out ransom, said it was confident it had adopted the right approach to secure the release of the aid workers.

On Sunday, the executive director of the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy, implied that a ransom call had been issued by the hostage-takers when she said that aid bodies had a "principle" of refusing to meet such demands.

Swiss television at midday Sunday showed clips in which the hostages appeared unsmiling, bare-chested, with cloths tied at the waist and wrapped around their legs, standing or sitting in a room. They looked fit, though no sound or statement accompanied the film.

In a later news programme, several hostages similarly dressed appeared outside in a narrow passage between two walls. The film showed one of the guards forcing a Swiss prisoner to raise his arms while threatening him with a gun.

The guard then made the other hostages lie down on the floor.

Mr. Kleiner said that packs of playing cards and basic necessities had been delivered to the prisoners on Sunday.

Iranian deputy calls for better ties with Germany

TEHRAN (AFP) — The deputy speaker of the Iranian parliament, Hassan Ruhani, on Monday called for efforts to improve ties with Germany which have been strained by the death sentence handed to a German businessman.

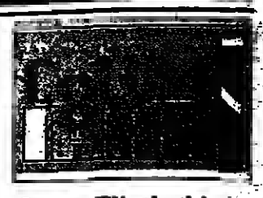
In talks with visiting German Deputy Guenter Verheugen of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Mr. Ruhani accused "certain enemies who wanted to damage the good relations between Bonn and Tehran," said state television.

Mr. Ruhani called on the leaders of both countries "to recreate a climate of confidence to strengthen ties."

The Iranian press has reported that Mr. Verheugen is to hold talks about the case of Helmut Hofer, 56, whose arrest and death sentence for having sex with a Muslim Iranian woman was announced in January.

According to Iranian television, Mr. Verheugen told Mr. Ruhani that Germany "wanted to improve its relations with Tehran and hopes that reciprocal visits will contribute towards strengthening cooperation in many fields."

Mr. Verheugen, who arrived in Tehran on Monday, is a foreign affairs expert and the vice president of the SPD camp in the Bundestag.



Queen Elizabeth's wealth down

LONDON (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II has taken a hit in the pocketbook. The queen tumbled 21 slots on the Sunday Times' annual list of Britain's richest people, coming in 94th with an estimated fortune of $420 million. Sir Paul McCartney displaced Andrew Lloyd Webber as Britain's richest musician. The Times estimated the former Beatle's fortune at $840 million compared to Webber's $806 million. Still, those figures seem paltry compared to the wealth of the man who finished first: Lord Sainsbury has an estimated wealth of $5.5 billion.

Downey and out

NEW YORK (AP) — After spending more than four months in the Los Angeles County jail, Robert Downey Jr. has come to appreciate the simpler things in life. "I can't tell you what a pleasure it is just to take a nice shower," the actor says in the latest issue of Time magazine. "It's so cool — using a hair dryer again, good towels — and I can lock the door if I want." Downey, 33, was released from jail earlier this month. He was sentenced last year after testing positive for drugs, a violation of his probation from an earlier drug conviction.

BBC defends payment for interview with O.J. Simpson

LONDON (AFP) — The BBC Monday defended paying $16,000 to O.J. Simpson for an interview, saying that the money would not be pocketed by the former American football star but would be used to pay civil damages. "O.J. Simpson was paid a fee within our producer's guidelines, as anyone would be on a whole programme interview," the television network said in a statement. "We do not discuss fees, but in this case, O.J. Simpson fees, paid directly to his agent, will go into the fund that is paying legal damages awarded to the Goldman family following the civil suit against O.J. Simpson."

Huppert to launch Cannes festival

PARIS (AFP) — French actress Isabelle Huppert is launching this year's Cannes film festival next month. She'll close it too. Huppert, the star of "La Ceremonie" succeeds her veteran compatriot Jeanne Moreau, who did the honours last year, for the festival's 51st edition. The opening gala is on May 13 and the festival closes on May 24. Huppert has had 12 films presented at Cannes in a career that so far has spanned more than two decades. The Cannes festival jury is headed by Martin Scorsese and includes actress Winona Ryder, director Alain Corneau and writer Zoe Valdes.

Protesters string undergarments across finance ministry's doors

MEXICO CITY (R) — Protesters against financial reforms working their way through the Mexican congress strung clothes lines hung with underwear across the doors of the country's finance ministry. Red lace panties and freshly washed pink-and-white boxer shorts were among the undergarments pegged to cords tied across the ministry's glass doors in the south of Mexico City, television pictures showed. Televisa news said the protest was organised by bank debtors still suffering from the after effects of the 1994 peso crash, who wanted to draw attention to their plight.